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THE PRESBYTERIAN CONFESSION OF 1967:
HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS

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THE PRESBYTERIAN CONFESSION OF 1967:

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1969

Dedicated to my Parents

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT vi

TABLE OF CONTENTS vii

INTRODUCTION. 1

PART I. EUROPEAN ORIGINS OF AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

Chapter

I. DOCTRINE AND POLITY ORIGINS. 18

General Introduction

A. DOCTRINAL ORIGINS

Introduction

Indirect Doctrinal Influences: Influence from the Continent

The Westminster Assembly

Some Concluding Remarks

B. ORIGINS OF PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

Introduction and General Remarks

England and Church Polity

Polity in Scotland and Ireland

Background to Westminster

Westminster

Westminster Aftermath

Conclusions

II. ORIGINS OF THE AUTHORITY PROBLEM. 99

General Introduction

A. THE CONTINENTAL REFORM ON AUTHORITY. . . . 100

Luther on Authority

Calvin on Authority

B. THE ENGLISH REFORM AND WESTMINSTER ON AUTHORITY. 128

Introductory Notes

The Early English Reform on Authority

The Episcopal Approach to Authority: John Jewel and Richard Hooker

The Puritan Doctrine on Authority

The Westminster Confession on Authority

PART II. AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM: BEGINNINGS UNTIL 1936

III. AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM: ITS TURNING POINT . . 164

Introduction

The Three Forces Involved

The Auburn Affirmation

Concluding Foresight

IV. AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM IN SCHISM. 200

Introduction

Colonial Presbyterianism: The First Schism

The Second or 'Great Schism'

Page

V. CONFESSIONAL REVISION. 270

Introduction

The Problem of Revision

The Debate About Revision

The Scriptural Problem

PART III. THE CONFESSION OF 1967: THEOLOGICAL CLIMATE AND ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS

VI. THE CONFESSION OF 1967: INTRODUCTION AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND . . . 308

Introduction

Emil Brunner

Karl Barth

Influence of Barth and Brunner on American Presbyterian Thought

Summary and Concluding Reflections

VII. THE 1967 CONFESSION AND ITS NEW DEVELOPMENT. . . 380

Introduction

The 1967 Confession on Scriptural Authority: Proposal, Debate, and Emendation

Further Study of the Confession of 1967

VIII. SOME ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS. 426

General Introduction

A. REFLECTIONS FROM THE PROTESTANT VIEWPOINT . 427

Introduction

Doctrinal Development and the 1967 Confession

Reflections on the Doctrinal Implications of Polity Development

Page
B. REFLECTIONS FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEWPOINT. 461
Introduction
Revelation and Vatican II
Infallibility and Fallibility
Irreformability and Reformability

CONCLUSIONS 516

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 534

INTRODUCTION

In May 1967 at Portland, Oregon, history was made for the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.[1] For the first time since the Westminster Assembly (1647) a Presbyterian Church had constitutionally accepted a new Book of Confessions (including a new Confessional statement) in addition to the Westminster Confession which had dominated the doctrinal scene for over three centuries. This event represented the peak-point of "a comprehensive aggiornamento"[2] for the church. To study the Presbyterian 'Confession of faith' in its historical-theological development and in its ecumenical significance (especially from the Roman Catholic viewpoint) will be the endeavor of this work.

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[1] See John A. Mackay, The Presbyterian Way of Life (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1960), pp. 25-26: "At the beginning . . . eight different denominations bore the name of 'Presbyterian.' The largest . . . [was] 'The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.' The second . . . 'The Presbyterian Church in the U. S.' (the Southern Presbyterian Church). In the South . . . two others . . . : 'The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church' . . . [and] The Cumberland Presbyterian Church. . . .

The 'United Presbyterian Church of North America' was formed when a union took place between two small Presbyterian churches in the U. S. which had been formed by the sons and daughters of staunch Presbyterians of Scottish origin. . . . Another . . . [was] 'The Reformed Presbyterian Church' . . . loyal to the witness of the Scottish Covenanters. . . .

In 1958, in the old Presbyterian city of Pittsburgh, two of these six, The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. and The United Presbyterian Church of North America, became one and formed . . . 'The United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.'"

[2] James Hastings Nichols, "A New Presbyterian Confession of Faith," Christianity and Crisis, 25 (May 17, 1965), p. 108. Dr. Nichols is church historian at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Polity, Doctrine, and Authority Problem

"Correctly speaking," wrote Lefferts Loetscher, "there is no such thing as 'Presbyterian' doctrine (or worship either), since the term . . . refers to a form of government."[3] Traditionally however the Presbyterian Church is Calvinist-Reformed, and so a 'confessional church'--whence a doctrinal church. The polity, one might say, comprises the 'external side' of Presbyterianism and doctrine its 'internal side.' The two are inseparable and often coincide. Their practical point-of-contact resides in the authority problem, a latent issue in both constituents and in their interrelationship--viz., doctrinal authority and ecclesiastical authority. Within this problem we are confronted with the "central principle of the Reformed faith, . . . that the Word of God is the only infallible rule of faith and practise. . ."[4] with its immediate corrollary: "no other document--not even one produced under the best ecclesiastical auspices--can be regarded *in the same light*."[5] The ecumenical issue involved here is fundamental. "One of the main reasons why the Reformers were constrained to break with the Roman Catholic Church," notes George Hendry, "was that their doctrines, which were the products of the mind of the church, were propounded as 'dogmas' divinely revealed and therefore 'infallible and irreformable.'"[6]

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[3] Lefferts A. Loetscher, A Brief History of the Presbyterians (Rev. and enl. ed.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 113. Dr. Loetscher is Professor of Church History at Princeton Theological Seminary.

[4] George S. Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 11. Dr. Hendry teaches Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological. He was one of the planning Committee for the new Confession.

[5] *Ibid*. (italics ours).

In the inter- and intra- Christian struggle for a doctrine on authority (which from our present distance can be seen more objectively) the Protestant and Roman positions hardened around their respective fundamental premises. The former gave primary place to Scripture in the Church's teaching-preaching; the latter gave the primacy to the Church hierarchy guarding and ruling-over Scripture. Neither totally denied the other's viewpoint. But each declaimed, often with overstatement, what they deemed to be the overstress of the other, eventually eliciting the cross accusations of bibliolatry and papolatry. The search continues even now, but with much more light and much less heat. Protestants are searching anew into the relationship between faith and order and asking honest questions about the necessary ecclesial-structural prerequisites for indefectibly passing-on the gospel-tradition. How are we to understand the Church's function in preaching and witnessing to Christ's Gospel? what is the concatenation of functions and authorities involved? and what is their interrelationship?

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[6] Ibid., p. 12.

All Christian theologians share this quest for a positive approach to the doctrine-polity relationship.

Principles of the Authority Problem

At the turn of the century the Presbyterian Scripture scholar, Charles Briggs, was ahead of his time in arguing that a balanced theology of authority demanded the integration under the Spirit of three human media: the Bible, the Church, and Reason. "If God really speaks to men in these three centres," he wrote, " . . . they ought to be complementary, and should combine in a higher unity for the guidance and the comfort of men."[7] Applying his insight to the 'canon-problem' (how determine the 'canon' of Scripture is holy?) Briggs suggested five principles. They may be extended to all scriptural interpretation. The principles are:[8] (1) the tradition of the Church presents probable evidence to the reason; (2) the internal character of the Scriptures argue their own holiness; (3) the Spirit bears witness directly to the heart and mind of the reader concerning a given passage, or (4) concerning the conjunction of passages as parts of one revelation, or (5) concerning the unified testimony of the Church. Briggs' breakthrough came in the fifth principle. Church authority had had a long polemical history especially with Rome, and now Briggs was throwing over the barriers. He wrote:

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[7] C. A. Briggs, The Authority of Holy Scripture, An Inaugural Address (2nd ed. with preface; New York: n.p., 1891), p. 95.

[8] See C. A. Briggs, General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture (New York: Scribner's 1899), pp. 163-66.

> . . . *But when* we come to know that the Church has been guided by the Divine Spirit in all the centuries, first in the formation of the Canon of the Holy Scripture, and then in its recognition of the Canon in the *three stages*, individual recognition, consensus, and official determination; that the same Holy Spirit who gives certainty today has given certainty to the Church in all the ages of the past, working in the individual and *also in the entire organism*,--*then we may know that the testimony of the Church is the testimony of the Divine Spirit speaking in the Church and through the Church* and we recognize *the same voice* in the *Bible* and in the *Church* and in our own *Reason*. The argument is complete, because the Divine Spirit has spoken to us with the same voice and to the same effect through the three media in which alone He speaks to man . . .[9]

Conceptions of the 'three media' had been too narrow and too departmentalized--Bible as book, Church as external-institution, Reason as logical proof--whereas in the concrete the three always overlapped. The Bible really signified the 'inner-gospel' as witnessed-to in many ways (both word and deed); the Church became the people 'in communicative union' with Christ the Word and with one another; Reason was seen as the only human-means by which the Church could communicate the gospel.

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 166 (italics ours).

Authority and the Confession Problem

The Christian struggle began in earnest when the 'authority-principles' were applied to the church's 'confessional doctrine.' Rome's solution took Briggs' third-church-stage ('official determination') and envisioned the church teaching body as an infallible-determining-power. Lutheran 'confessional theology' followed close behind Rome--at least with regard to their own historical symbols. Edmund Schlink summed up the Lutheran position as follows:

> . . . we fail to understand a Confession as a confession if we seek in it only a historically conditioned answer to a specific problem of its own time. Surely, if a Confession is an exposition of Holy Scripture and a witness to the one eternal truth, then its claim remains in force even after the concrete heresy . . . has ceased being an issue. Confessions rise above the viscissitudes of heresy, even though they retain the marks of their particular origin . . . Contrary we must discover and recognize the confessional statements for what they are--statements designed by the church to bind once and for all the proclamation of all subsequent times.[10]

Reformed theology criticized both the Roman and the Lutheran positions. "Lutheranism . . . does well to emphasize the role of its historic confessions," wrote Edward Willis, "but it must be able to see these dynamically as not only challenging but also as being challenged."[11] The Reformed position saw two different spirits at work within confessionalism: "one emphasizing the stability of the confessions, and one emphasizing confessionalism's dynamic character."[12] The first was ruled out as threatening to growth. This left them with only the semper reformanda.

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[10] Edmund Schlink, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions, trans. by Paul Koehneke and Herbert Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), xviii-xix.

[11] Edward Willis, World Confessionalism and the Ecumenical Movement, A Fellowship Thesis in History presented to Princeton Theological Seminary, n.p., 1957, p. 191.

The touchy question obviously became that of infallibility versus 'semper reformanda.' Edward Dowey, chairman of the planning Committee of the 1967 Confession sees the 'confessional-statement' as "interpretation rather than repetition of Biblical materials"[13]--but at the same time he firmly denies that any document or statement is 'adequate for all times' or 'infallible.'[14] This denial of any human share in infallibility creates a problem concerning the 'truth-value' of confessions which in its turn involves the entire doctrinal-development problem. Concerning these latter two problems the 'dynamic confessionalism' of the Reformed theologians (especially the neo-orthodox) manifests a certain ambivalence. Thus Dowey, while denying infallibility, affirms the interpretational function of Confessions. (We presume he means true interpretation.) "The test of a confession," he notes, "is . . . whether it brings the church actually to express in words and deeds the meaning of the gospel in contemporary life."[15] The 'meaning of the gospel' seems to bespeak a faith-truth and in-as-much-as such should be 'unchangeable' and 'infallible,' even if inadequately expressed. Dowey's Commentary on the 1967 Confession speaks of the "faith expressed in the confessions"[16] and the Confessions's opening statement affirms: "The church confesses its faith when it bears a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ."[17] The Commentary speaks of a certain "permanence"[18] and of a "general homogeneity"[19] regarding confessional-doctrine. This leads again to the infallibility-and-authority problem: how does one discern this 'homogeneity' and 'permanence?' In what precisely does the'guidance power' of the Spirit consist vis-à-vis the church's confessional role?

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[12] Ibid., p. 208.

[13] E. A. Dowey, Jr., "Confessions of the Church: Types and Functions," Report of the Special Committee on A Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith To the 177th General Assembly (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1965), p. 19. Dr. Dowey teaches Systematic theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. As chairman his influence in the drafting of the new Confession was most important.

[14] See ibid., p. 20.

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Edward A. Dowey, Jr., A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and An Introduction to the Book of Confessions (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 30. Dr. Dowey's Commentary appeared after the major portion of this work was completed. As Chairman of the Committee of Fifteen it deserves careful consideration for the interpretative information that only he and the committee possess. We have been able to use the work during our final draft (but not as extensively as we would have wished).

[17] The Book of Confessions (Philadelphia: The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1966, 1967), n. 9.01.

[18] Dowey, A Commentary . . . , p. 32.

[19] Report . . . (supra n. 13), p. 23.

Fundamentally at issue is the revelation-faith-traditioning process of which the confessing process is a vital and integral part. Within the process there emerges a tension between the 'lasting authority' and the 'living stream' forces (later to be called the mosaic-abrahamic forces). This tension seems basic to Christianity and, rather than demand an 'either-or' choice, the growing consensus is for a 'both-and' paradox. True development demands both the 'permanent authority' and the dynamic 'semper reformanda.' Both are necessary constituents of the 'faith-moment.' "Any desire to play off the Scriptures and the confessions against each other," warns Carl Braaten, "means that we have not grasped their true unity in the Christ of the viva vox evangelii. . . . They both stand in the living stream of the preaching church . . . We define the relation between the preaching which originates and the preaching which perpetuates the life of the church."[20] Manfred Hoffmann, Heidelberg's church historian, is less sanguine. He sees the 'infallibility-semper reformanda' antinomy as part of the greater Roman-Protestant antinomy and as 'constituting two mutually exclusive realities.' The only hope he holds is for an 'over-arching' church:

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[20] Carl E. Braaten, "The Crisis of Confessionalism," Dialog, 1 (Winter 1962), p. 40.

> . . . Absoluteness and relativity, identity and variability, unity and particularity, continuity and historicity, authority and freedom, tradition and progress--in short, a *theologia perennis* and a *theologia viatorum*--will always constitute a dialectical tension, offering two theological and ecclesiological alternatives of emphasis. As irreconcilable as they are in themselves, they could possibly be held without giving up their peculiarities in one overarching Church, if she could tolerate the coexistence of these two divergent yet mutually complementary theological approaches.[21]

Still others take the Protestant 'openness' to reform (*semper reformanda*) in a serious enough manner to question the possibility for the integration of the 'permanent' and the 'changeable.' This is the position of Dr. James H. Nichols concerning the *jure divino* question of ministerial orders (papal, episcopal, etc.)--which is an application of the general problem. "Here is an implicit challenge to defenders of such orders," he says, "to present evidence for their divine right that can stand against historical criticism."[22] Our own reflections in answer to this ecumenical challenge will be limited to the generic problem, that of infallible-church-authority and permanent-irreformable-doctrine.

Historical Development of Authority: An Outline

The historical-theological development of the authority problem had, according to Hendry,[23] three phases: (1) the phase of too much church-authority; (2) the phase of too much biblical-authority; and (3) the 'search for balance' phase--the Word _and_ Spirit _in the_ Church. Though phase one was primarily assigned to Rome it would have vestiges in the Presbyterian struggle. "The Church formally acknowledged that what Scripture says is authoritative," said Hendry, "but it was _solely_ for the Church to say what Scripture says . . . like ventriloquist to his dummy."[24] Together with the distortion of phase two (biblicism) the excess of phase one was corrected by an emphasis on the _reciprocity_ of church and bible under the Spirit. Hendry spells out this reciprocity:

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[21] Manfred Hoffmann, "Church and History in Vatican II's Constitution on the Church: A Protestant Perspective," *Theological Studies*, 29 (June 1968), p. 214.

[22] James Hastings Nichols, "Ecumenical Aspects of the 'Confession of 1967,'" *The Ecumentist*, 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1967) p. 109.

> The relation between them is twofold: the testimony of the Church is a response to the testimony of Scripture, which is prior to it; in the testimony of the Church the testimony of Scripture is heard and repeated. But it is also through the testimony of the Church that the testimony of Scripture is brought out. . . . it is only within the context of the Church's faith that its efficacy is known.
>
> It was necessary at the Reformation to assert the doctrine of the Spirit in the Word _in opposition to_ the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Spirit in the Church, but the reason for this was, _paradoxically, that there can be no real opposition between them;_ for the Spirit is in the Church only when it is a Church of the Word, and the Spirit is in the Word only when it is the Word in the Church . . . To isolate the doctrine of the Spirit in the Word from its context in the faith of the Church is to put assunder what God has joined together.

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[23] G. S. Hendry, _The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology_ (2nd ed. rev. and enl.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), pp. 142-43.

[24] _Ibid_.

> To sum up, the testimony of the Spirit in the Word is registered, not in any properties of the Scriptural record, but where the Church receives the testimony of the Word and repeats it in the testimony of its own faith. It occurs, so to speak, at the point where the testimony of Scripture and the testimony of the Church converge. But this is a point outside and above themselves, a point that they can reach only by over-reaching themselves. This point is the presence of the Living Lord in the power of his finished work. The testimony of Scripture and the testimony of the Church are instrumental to it; but they cannot effect it--least of all by the advancement of exalted claims on behalf of either of them. . . . They are means of grace; but the grace is that of the Lord Jesus Christ, which proceeds from the love of God and is imparted to us in the communion of the Holy Spirit.[25]

The historical analysis of the origins and development of American Presbyterianism which now follows will have three stages (parts) which for the most part comply with Hendry's three phases: (1) the European origins (Continental and British Reform) representing the era of excessive State-ism and ecclesiasticism (from radical papacy to radical presbytery to radical episcopacy); (2) the American Reform through its final schism (1936) comprising the era of ecclesiastical-biblicism (via 'confessional-subscriptionism'); and (3) the neo-orthodox Reform culminating in the 1967 Book of Confessions complying with Hendry's balanced-reciprocity phase. Readers familiar with the European and early American development of Presbyterianism may begin with part three. But to see the historical-development as a whole the earlier stages are necessary. In our first two parts we have collected previously diffuse sources under the common egis of the revelation-authority (development of doctrine) problem.

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[25] Ibid., pp. 94-95.

Conclusions

A unique aspect of the Presbyterian development, a quasi leit-motif to the main revelation-authority theme, will be the 'confessional-subscription' problem. It could be considered a strictly 'polity' matter, but one need not look too far to find its basic doctrinal implications. From the time of the early subscription controversies the underlying problem presented itself as 'infallibility.' "I take Subscription to imply a solemn Declaration to the World," wrote Jonathan Dickinson (in 1729), "that we believe the Articles subscribed to be the Mind and Will of God, free of all Error and Mistake."[26] Dickinson was actually describing the position of his adversary, John Thomson, who clearly affirmed confessional infallibility':

> And if it be said that the Confession, though sound, is not of divine authority,
>
> I answer the Matter is of divine authority, being contained in the Word of God, and the Words, tho' composed by fallible Men, being agreeable to the divine Matter, . . . and so far as they are agreeable to the infallible Word, are themselves infallible, as to the Truth contained in them, tho' . . . they fall short of scriptural Perfection as to the manner

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[26] Thomas A. Schaefer, "The Beginnings of Confessional Subscription in the Presbyterian Church," McCormick Quarterly, 19 (Jan. 1966), p. 116, citing Dickinson's Remarks on John Thomson's Overture (p. 30). See infra chap. four.

> of Expression; for whatsoever is agreeable to an infallible Rule, in so far is it self infallible.[27]

Dickinson complained that Thomson's 'subscriptionism' and its infallibility led either to Roman Catholicism or Quakerism. Above all he affirmed that it denied man the freedom which faith requires. "The opponents . . . ," he argued, "have no desire to prevent those who wish from subscribing; . . . But to impose subscription . . . is to violate consciences and lord it over them."[28] "For my own Part," he concluded, "I can cheerfully come into any Method for securing our Faith, that I can apprehend consistent with Liberty of Conscience, and Christian Freedom."[29] For our own part we will attempt to show that Thomson had the right answer but for the wrong reason, whereas the opposite was true of Dickinson. One cannot impose infallibility. It can however bless a human-means with its guidance, and invite a response.

Thus in the final analysis our ecumenical reflections must address themselves to the entire epistemology of faith problem. If revelation-faith entails God's infallible-communication to man, and if the only media (instruments) are human, then the 'faith-truth' must be communicated in and through these human media, including of course 'doctrinal statements.' These will include both the 'sacrosanct ones from the past' and the 'living voice of the gospel' interpreting them. But if this is true, there seems to be an 'ambivalence' set up between the Calvinistic 'no-infallibility' and its 'theology of the Spirit.' A possible ecumenical meeting-ground lies in the common rejection of epistomological-fideism (or docetism) and in the common affirmation of the pneumatological-incarnational principle: the Spirit operating in and through human media united in their turn with the humanity of the risen Christ. As the human nature of Christ is united to the Word, so the human witnesses are united in the revelational-faith moment with the Spirit of the Word. The Spirit is being sent continually to guide both the receipt and communication of faith. The Word continues to become human in Christ's mystical body.

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[27] Ibid., p. 114 citing Thomson's Overture, pp. 14-15.

[28] Ibid., citing Remarks . . . , p. 30.

[29] Ibid., citing Remarks . . . , p. 30.

The following elements bear watching as they appear in the epistemology-of-faith analysis. (1) There is the basic Christian evangelium or gospel to be communicated. (2) The communication of this gospel must be interpretational, and so historical and developmental--ever new and ever old. (3) It takes place within a visibly structured community of teacher-preacher and listener-believer who are dynamically interrelated in such wise that roles often reverse. Teacher is also listener-believer and believer shares in the teaching-preaching process. (4) From the teaching-preaching and listening-believening process there evolves a 'communal confess-ing' of the Word or faith through the medium of human-words and human-witness. (5) Finally, the entire process takes place under the guidance of and with the illuminative-directive charism of the Spirit.

Spirit, Gospel, Church, teaching and listening, communal-confessing--all must be present in an integral epistemology of faith. Actually we are in search of a theology of revelation in its relationship to a theology of the Christian Church with both being understood in the light of a theology of the Spirit. A familiar paradox will begin to appear as the historical-theological development takes pattern. Through the labors of development initial complexity will yield to the simplicity of the integral picture.

PART I. EUROPEAN ORIGINS OF AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

American Presbyterianism cannot be understood without understanding its European origins--Continental and English. These origins are more directly traceable to the English Reform, often called the Puritan Reform. But the English Reform stems from and continues the basic Continental Reforms of Luther and Calvin. And so we shall survey the influences arising from both sides of the English Channel.

In itself 'Presbyterianism' bespeaks a type of 'polity' or Church government--episcopal, papal, congregational, etc. But the Presbyterian Church is also an evangelical-confessional church and as such it has a basic doctrinal-confession or gospel interpretation which constitutes it as one of the known Christian denominations. In this sense it has a doctrine. Our survey will cover both aspects of Presbyterianism, her doctrine and her polity. For methodological reasons the two aspects will be treated separately in this chapter. Actually they are interrelated and often overlap.

The most important inquiry will reflect on both doctrine and polity from a theological point of view, seeking a theology of doctrine and a theology of polity. Theologizing about them brings us quickly to their meeting-point and their point of reciprocal interrelationship. This involves the problem of authoritative doctrinal interpretation and of doctrinal development in their special relationship to the church. This will become more evident in the next chapter on authority but the groundwork is set down in this present chapter. The chapter will have two parts--the first (A) on the doctrinal origins, the second (B) on polity origins.

A. DOCTRINAL ORIGINS

INTRODUCTION

Doctrine is more general and more fundamental than polity, and consequently we begin our study of Presbyterian origins with doctrine. The primary doctrinal source is the Westminster Confession which until 1967 was the sole doctrinal Confession for both British and American Presbyterianism. Westminster brought together the best theological heritage created by the protest against Rome (as well as some of the best heritage of Rome). Besides the historical development of Presbyterian doctrine we reserve an oblique reflection for the theology of doctrinal-development. This will become a main theme.

Three Phases of Original Reform

American Presbyterianism took rise from British (English, Scotch, and Irish) Presbyterianism which in turn was a segment of the British Puritan Reform. Even though England had her own Martin Luther in the person and spirit of John Wyclif,[1] the Continental Reform remained the primary source of influence on the English Reform. Climaxing in the Westminster Confession the English Reform was simply the third phase of the Great Continental Reforms of which the Lutheran and Calvinist were the first two. Each phase built upon and complemented its predecessor.

Lutheran Phase

The Lutheran phase set the fundamental doctrinal tenets of the reform. Luther protested against Rome's abuses, especially those regarding the practicalities of justification--the excessive *ex opere operato* emphasis in sacramentology and indulgences. By his own emphasis on the priesthood of the faithful he laid the foundation for a new church polity with its much more active role for the laity and freedom from any 'hierarchology.' As far as Church-State was concerned Luther was still a man of his times. He was far from the principles of religious freedom, 'separation', and of religious toleration as we now know them.[2]

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[1] C. A. Briggs, *American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early History* (New York: Scribner, 1885), p. 18. comments: "The morning star of the Reformation, John Wyclif, the greatest divine of the late middle age, saw this radical error of the Papal Antichrist, and presented the remedy in the doctrine of the supremacy of the Scriptures--of the voice of the Holy Spirit teaching the Church through the Scriptures."

Calvinist Phase

The Calvinist phase reformed the Reform. It added its own further doctrinal refinements primarily with regard to predestination and the real-presence. In the latter doctrine Calvin chose the middle road between Zwingli's 'symbolic presence' and Luther's corporeal-ubiquitarian (in-with-and under) presence. As for the former, starting from the singular viewpoint of God's complete sovereignty Calvin deduced what to him were the logical consectaries of a sound doctrine of man's fall and redemption. Calvin and Calvinism further complemented and developed Luther's seeds for a new polity and order[3] with the principles of religious freedom and separation-from-State coming to a limited theoretical existence.

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[2] See Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, I (4th rev. ed., New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), p. 212. "Luther and Melancthon were chiefly bent upon purification of doctrine, and established State churches controlled by princes, theologians and pastors . . . Luther first proclaimed the principle of general priesthood, but in practice it was confined to the civil rulers, and carried out in a wrong way by making them the supreme bishops of the Church, and reducing the church to a degrading dependence on the State."

[3] See Schaff, I, 218: "Calvin and Knox carried the reform into the sphere of government, discipline, and worship, and labored to found a pure and free church of believers . . . . . . [They] upheld the sole headship of Christ, and endeavored to renovate the civil state on a theocratic basis."

The English Reform

The English Reformers built upon Calvin's refinements of Luther, further rounding off the sharp edges of Calvin's hyper-logical deductions (e.g., reprobation) and greatly forwarding the polity-struggle for religious freedom. The crowning point of the Reform and its transition point to 'New England' happened with the Assembly at Westminster and the formulation of its Standards. The Westminster Standards are thoroughly Calvinistic in their origins, but Calvinistic as absorbed into, interpreted according to, and ameliorated by the circumstances proper to the British Reform. Primary among these circumstances were affairs of polity and order within the Church itself and between the Church and the State. The 'Puritan-spirit' was waxing anti-hierarchical--mostly anti-papacy, but in growing measure also anti-episcopal. At the same time it was lending increasing support to a constitutional or parliamentary monarchy in opposition to the existent absolute-monarchy.

The Westminster Confession: Style and General Content

In contrast to early Confessions of the Continental Reform the overriding characteristic of the Westminster Confession would be its didactic and impersonal tone. Yet Briggs for one defends the Westminster Confession against the accusations of excessive scholasticism.

Briggs doesn't deny that the fathers of the Westminster Assembly put too much stress on Predestination and Election, but he affirms that "the British Presbyterians guarded these doctrines from abuse better than the continental divines, and advanced upon them in urging growth in grace. . . ."[4] Schaff would more easily apply the 'scholasticism' category to Westminster. In this regard he placed them between the hyper-scholastic _Canons of Dort_ and the earlier Reform Symbols. "They reflect the hard severity of Puritanism"; Schaff writes, "they embody too much metaphysical divinity, and overstep the limits which divide a public confession of faith from a scientific treatise of theology."[5] Dr. Edward Dowey follows the lead of B. B. Warfield in describing the Standards _not_ as a _new_ Reform document but rather as 'a consensus document of international Calvinism' for the half-century preceding its formulation.[6] As _consensus_ it represented an ordered-compromise with regard to the sharper theological issues. It avoided in particular the much disputed interpretation of Predestination which upheld the _supralapsarian_ theory of negative-reprobation.

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[4] Briggs, _Hist_., p. 24.

[5] Schaff, I, 790-94.

[6] Edward J. Dowey, "The Problem of Revelation in Several Protestant Confessional Documents," Seminar Paper to Faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary, n.p., n.d., p. 14, cites B. Warfield "Hist. of Westminster Assembly," _Princeton Theological Review_ (1908), pp. 371-74.

The real shortcoming of the Westminster Confession according to Dowey lay in the fact that Calvin's concept of faith especially in its Christian-epistemological element had been absorbed into an overly rigid conception of Scripture as the rule of faith. At the same time its Christological-justification aspect was lost in the logicisms of the theory on the Decree(s). But in spite of these shortcomings Dowey still claims that in the Westminster Confession "a very great development has taken place by which an elaborately objective authority for dogmatic theology has been thoroughly worked out and set down with much more detail and system than in any of the other documents . . ."[7]

DIRECT DOCTRINAL INFLUENCES: INFLUENCE OF THE ENGLISH REFORM

Broad-Stroke Sketch of English Reform

We start our survey with the English scene first sketching in bold strokes before filling in the detail. Then we will trace the Continental influence. The simplest division for the English scene is to follow the line of monarchical succession. There are seven periods.

(1) From 1527 to 1547. Henry VIII abolished the authority of the Pope and of the Roman See over the Church in

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[7] See *Ibid*., p. 17.

England. The supreme human authority over the Church Henry reserved to himself. But like his daughter Elizabeth he would remain Roman Catholic and traditional when it came to other matters of reform, especially worship and doctrine.

(2) From 1547 to 1553. Henry's young son Edward VI became England's 'boy King.' Edward was especially influenced by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, who was the Melancthon of the English Reform. It had been Cranmer's diplomatic subservience to Henry that "had saved the cause of the Reformation through the trials of a despotic reign for better times."[8] Thus it can be said that the real Reform in England began with Cranmer and Edward VI. During Edward's reign the Universities were opened wide to the latest theological thought from the Continent, which Henry had assiduously proscribed.

(3) From 1553 to 1558, Catherine of Aragon's daughter Mary took the throne. "Bloody Mary" avenged the injustice done to her mother with the cruel Protestant martyrdom as a result of which "England was determined, with a determination which has never abated . . . , to maintain Protestantism as the national faith."[9]

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[8] Schaff, I, 595.

[9] Earl L. Douglas, The Westminster Assembly, Its History Formularies, and Abiding Values (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1943), p. 4.

(4) From 1558 to 1603. Here we have the long reign of Elizabeth, "the greatest of the Tudors, [who] inherited the virtues and vices of her Catholic father . . . and [of] her Protestant mother (Anne Boleyn)."[10] She was a Catholic at heart but was compelled by circumstances to remain Protestant. Although the Puritans helped to keep her on the throne she nevertheless opposed them and became one of the chief impediments to the progress of evangelical faith in England.

(5) From 1603 to 1645. This period represents the first part of the Stuart dynasty. James VI of Scotland became James I of England-and-Scotland upon the death of his cousin Elizabeth. While in early life he had professed unbounded admiration for the Church which Knox founded, with the passing of years James came to love power above all else. And so he opposed and oppressed the Puritans who were the champions of freedom. In 1625 Charles I took the throne and increased his father's opposition to the Puritans. The Puritan polity-struggle in its turn had now shifted gears from opposition-to-the-Pope to opposition-to-the-tyranny-of-the-King. Various Church-State relationships were at this time being proposed varying from absolute monarchy to the left-

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[10] Schaff, I, 595.

wing Puritans or 'Independents' who espoused an early form of today's 'Congregationalism.' At the 'center' of the Puritan party were the Presbyterians who were in the majority. They were characterized by their polity: State-wise they espoused a limited or parliamentary-monarchy; Church-wise they opted for a clergy-laity or 'presbyterian' government; Church-State-wise they opted for a status patterned after the Calvinistic-Genevan 'theocracy.'

The right-wing or conservative Puritans were those compromising between prelacy and presbytery thus limiting the powers of the episcopacy by the check-balance provided by the 'presbyterian' polity.

(6) From 1649 to 1660. The Protectorate of Cromwell and the ascendency of the Independents brought about the demise of the monarchy and episcopacy including the execution of Archbishop Laud and King Charles. The Presbyterians with their advocacy of limited monarchy were destined to clash with Cromwell.

(7) From 1660 to 1688. The Restoration of Charles II came in 1660. The Presbyterians were largely instrumental in the restoration. They had hopes that their form of Church government, almost triumphant at Westminster, would now at last be adopted. But Charles, true Stuart that he was, yielded to the pressures of the now episcopal-dominated parliament

and passed an Act of Uniformity restoring the episcopal form of Church government to complete power. As a result two thousand Presbyterian ministers in England, and four-hundred in Scotland, were driven from the Church. After Charles' death in 1688 his Roman Catholic brother James II succeeded him. His determination to restore popery so alarmed both episcopal and presbyterian Protestants that they immediately forgot their own squabbles, united forces, and deposed the King. William of Orange, the Dutch Presbyterian married to James' daughter Mary, accepted the invitation to come "and rescue religion and liberty." Thus Protestantism was finally 'established' in England. And in retrospect the Presbyterian-Puritan movement played a key role.

We must now fill in some of the key details especially those regarding doctrinal development.

The English Reform and Westminster

Logically it could be expected that we first take up the influence of the Continental Reformers. This would fit with such comments as Schaff's "that the ruling theology of the Church of England in the latter half of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century was Calvinistic."[11] But since the Westminster Standards include no direct foot-notes allowing us to trace the continental origins, we choose to wend our way backwards from the more direct and more certain influences on the Assembly to the more indirect and less certain influences.

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[11] Schaff, I, 604.

The Assembly was given the overall task of bringing the 'creed' of England up to date and into as much accord as possible with other creeds at home and abroad. At first the Assembly was commissioned (July 5, 1643) to simply revise the XXXIX Articles. But after the arrival of the Scotch Commissioners at Westminster the doctrinal task was broadened (October 12, 1643) and the fathers were commissioned to formulate a new confession of faith acceptable at once to English, Scotch, and Irish. The influence of the Scotch Commissioners would be significant. The Scotch divines were straight Calvinists, the successors of John Knox who studied at Geneva. But they realized the need for a Confessional statement much more developed than Knox's Scots Confession of 1560. Many Scotch ministers had spent time in Ireland at the time of their own persecutions where they became familiar with the work of Ireland's primate James Ussher, especially his Irish Articles. The majority of the English divines present at the Assembly were also favorably familiar with Ussher's work, and wanted a Confession of faith which like the Irish Articles would be much more pointedly Calvinistic (Reform) than the XXXIX Articles. (Recall that the majority of the Assembly were Presbyterian Calvinists, the King having forbidden his Bishops, the Episcopal party, to attend.) Thus the influence of the Scotch Reformers far from clashing with the interests of the English and Irish Reformers would be in perfect harmony with the entire development that had been taking place in their own countries. Many members of the Episcopal party, including James Ussher himself, while maintaining loyal obedience to the King's prohibition from attending the Assembly, were in full sympathy with the doctrinal work taking place at Westminster.

With what has been said we can now understand Mitchell's point when he wrote in his History of the Westminster Assembly: " . . . There is abundant evidence that . . . the Assembly's Confession is derived immediately from native sources, . . . not conclusions adopted slavishly from any continental school."[12] Along with Briggs and Schaff, Mitchell asserts that the primary direct source of influence is traceable to "those unquestionably Augustinian Articles of the Irish Church."[13] The "Irish

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[12] Alexander F. Mitchell, The Westminster Assembly, Its History and Standards (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1883), p. 372. Mitchell (p. 371) had ruled out the influence of the Continental scholastic Calvinists (the incipient 'federal theology') of Cocceius and Francis Turretine--since "the Westminster divines had done their work before either . . . had become known as influential factors in the development of the Reformed Theology."

[13] Ibid., p. 373, see also Schaff, I, 761; and C. Briggs, "The Documentary History of the Westminster Assembly, "Presbyterian Review (1880), pp. 127-63.

Articles" had been adopted at the Irish Convocation of 1615 and were most probably written under the principle authorship of Archbishop James Ussher,[14] the most renowned and erudite of the contemporary British theologians. His attendance at Westminster was greatly desired by all, but we saw that his loyalty to the King kept him away. Mitchell suggests that even his absence influenced the Assembly fathers, who " . . . meant to show him and others like him, who had not had the courage to take their place among them, that though absent they were not forgotten nor their work disregarded."[15] It is significant that Ussher's good friend Dr. Hoyle, Professor of Divinity at Dublin where Ussher himself had taught, was appointed to the Committee which framed the Confession.

The Westminster Confession then, can be said to represent " . . . the Calvinistic system in its scholastic maturity after it had passed through the sharp conflict of Arminianism in Holland, and as it had shaped itself in the minds of the Scotch Presbyterians and English Puritans during their conflict with High-Church prelacy."[16] It kept on the track of the English Articles of Religion, which the Assembly was at first directed to revise, and with which it was essentially agreed. This development was also in line with the development begun several years before the Arminian controversy by the framers of the Lambeth Articles (1595) and culminating in the Synod of Dort (1619). In Ireland Ussher himself had pursued the same course and incorporated in his work the substance of the English Articles and the full text of the Lambeth Arts. The influence of the Irish Articles on Westminster we have already seen. All seems to fit if we keep calling to mind the overall purpose of the Westminster Assembly--to seek out the consensus for a united Reformed creed among the English, Scotch, and Irish. We should add here that this 'fits' as far as the Westminster Confession and its origins are concerned. But it decidedly does not fit as far as England and the English Reform was concerned. Close as the Presbyterian Calvinists came to success at Westminster due to their temporary majority, it still seems that 'even if' they had succeeded it could only have been temporary. The Reform spirit in England was broader than the Presbyterian mode of Puritanism prevalent at Westminster.

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[14] See _ibid_., p. 373.

[15] _Ibid_., p. 379.

[16] Schaff, I, 760.

INDIRECT DOCTRINAL INFLUENCES: INFLUENCE FROM THE CONTINENT

Introductory Remarks

The Westminster Standards originated with and stayed on the 'English track' and England truly had her own unique Reform. But true as this is, it is equally true that the Continental Reform had a fundamental if often only indirect influence on the English Reform. Although the English XXXIX Articles were formulated prior to many of the key Reform Creeds, the primary works of Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Calvin and Bullinger were well known and used at the English Universities.[17] They were thoroughly assimilated by the English theologians and adapted to the unique English problems and circumstances. The struggles and development gone through by the Lutheran and Reformed theologians--the intra-Lutheran dispute between the 'orthodox' and the followers of Melanchton (the 'Philippists'), and the Lutheran-Reformed disputes--were all absorbed into and reflected by the English Reform. A good case could be made for the study of the English Reform in terms of the two Continental 'schools' (Lutheran and Calvinist). "Lutheranism is the more conservative and historical," Schaff writes, "the Reformed Church more progressive and radical . . . The former proceeded on the principle to retain what was not forbidden by the Bible; the latter to abolish what was not commanded."[18] One can understand from this description why it has been said that the Anglican Church is a "Lutheranizing Church."[19] After all the struggles were over, the "Church of England" was characterized by its conservative, historical-traditional notes. Like the Lutheran Church it is closer to Roman traditions and does not accept all the changes of the Reformed Churches, which were more often 'simplifying changes,' that is, 'abolishing what was not commanded.'

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[17] See ibid., p. 630: "Bishop Hooper had become a . . . disciple of Bullinger by a long residence [two years] in Zurich before the accession of Edward VI, and was consulted on the Articles. Cranmer . . . embraced the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper as early as 1548 . . . ; he was in intimate personal contact with Bucer, Peter Martyr, John Laski [a Lasco], and Knox at the time he framed the articles. . . . The Elizabethan revision was the work of the Marian exiles, who felt . . . in complete harmony with the Swiss divines especially with Bullinger of Zurich . . . On this point we have the explicit testimonies of the very men who were the chief assistants of Archbishop Parker in the revision of the articles . . .".

It would be too simplistic however to align the entire English Reform with the Lutheran. There were true Calvinists among the English Reformers. The more accurate description of the English Reform is that it reflects the *entire* Continental Reform in its different stages: its more conservative Lutheran beginnings, as well as its later more progressive Calvinistic reform.

Lutheran Roots

Henry VIII in spite of his personal dislike for Luther did call on Luther's closest disciple, Melancthon, to help in the English Reformation.[20] From 1535-1538 negotiations took place with Lutheran divines as a result of which several of the Forty-Two Edwardian Articles were almost literally copied from the Augsburg Confession.[21] Of course we must remember that England and Luther had another common base in Augustinianism. As the Lutheran Reform developed and underwent further reform, there was a reaction by the English Reformers. "In the violent controversies," writes Schaff, " . . . which led to the Formula of Concord, England sided with the milder [less conservative] Melancthonian School."[22] The English had their arch-conservatives too, among whom would be Elizabeth who "made an effort to prevent the adoption of the *Formula* [of Concord] and the condemnation of the Reformed doctrines."[23] With the advent of the Stuarts the opposition of the monarchy to Reform would reach its peak.[24] The conservative, High-Church episcopacy, usually rallied about their Monarchs. The Monarchs played up to the episcopacy.

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[18] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

[19] See *ibid.*, pp. 600, 218.

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[20] See *ibid.*, p. 600, n. 2: "Under Edward VI Melancthon was called again, and in 1553 he was appointed Professor of Divinity in Cambridge, but he never saw England."

[21] See *ibid.*, p. 612. Schaff further on (p. 623) writes: "The Edwardian articles (1563) were based in part . . . upon a previous draft of the Thirteen Articles (1538), which was the joint product of German and English divines, and based upon the doctrinal Articles of the Augsburg Confession. Some passages were transferred verbatim from the Lutheran document to the Thirteen Articles, and from these to the Forty-two (1553,) and were retained in the Elizabethan revision (1563 and 1571) . . ."

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 600. [23] Schaff, I, p. 600.

[24] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 602.

Rise of Calvinism in the Early English Reform

As early as 1542 Henry had prohibited Calvin's works. But once the throne went to young Edward, Cranmer and the Reform-party gained the controlling influence. Cranmer corresponded freely with Calvin and Calvin urged a more thorough reform for England. As a result Cranmer summoned such Continental Reformers as Peter Martyr, Martin Bucer, and John Laski (a Lasco) to England where he gave them high positions at Oxford and Cambridge.[25] Knox was summoned from Scotland and appointed as one of Edward's chaplains. John Hooper, perhaps England's leading reformer at the time who had spent two years with Bullinger at Zurich, was consecrated Bishop of Gloucester. Cranmer's dream was to formulate an 'evangelical catholic creed' in conjunction with the German and Swiss Reformers.[26] He finally had to settle for a purely English formula, the *Forty-Two Articles*--essentially the same as the Elizabethan *XXXIX Articles*.

Forced into exile during the reign of "Bloody Mary" the English Reformers were warmly received in Switzerland and other centers of Continental Reform. Under Elizabeth they returned with new zeal and they brought back what they had learned from the Masters. But typical of Elizabeth's shrewd 'slow-down' opposition she quickly restored the Edwardian Articles with a number of her own personal changes--now called the Elizabethan or Thirty Nine Articles. Elizabeth however could not stem the reform and, to her credit, her opposition to it was not foolish. The officially authorized text of her XXXIX Articles was adopted by Convocation in 1571 after it had been edited by Bishop John Jewel of Salisbury. In 1562 Jewel had written assuringly to his friend Peter Martyr at Zurich: "As to the matters of doctrine, we have pared everything away to the very quick, and do not differ from you by a nail's breath."[27]

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[25] See Schaff I, 602. Also Mitchell, *Hist. of the W.A.*, p. 327.

[26] See *ibid*.: " . . . in 1548 he conceived the plan of inviting Melancthon of Wittenberg, Bullinger of Zurich, Calvin of Geneva, Bucer of Strasburg, Peter Martyr, Laski and others to Lambeth. . . ."

It is in the famous XVIIth Article that the Elizabethan Articles dealt with the mysteryof Predestination. Schaff holds it up as the model expression for a properly balanced Reformed statement on this topic. "It omits the knotty points;" he says, ". . . But it very clearly teaches a free eternal election in Christ, which carries with it . . . the certainty of the call."[28] From this Schaff rather facilely concludes: "This is all that is essential, and a matter of dogma in the Reformed Churches;

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[27] Zurich Letters, Second series, I, 100; quoted in Schaff, I, 602 (cf. also I, 633).

[28] Schaff, I, 635.

the rest of what is technically called Calvinism in distinction from Arminianism, is logical inference, and belongs to the theology of the school."[29] But at the actual historical moment both of the XXXIX Articles [1571] and of Westminster [1643] the issue was not as clairvoyant and settled as Schaff seems to make it. There was much room for development-in-understanding concerning this doctrine. For true 'evolution' it is necessary to retrace one's steps in case 'devolution' sets in. Such was the case in the Calvinistic explanation of Predestination. American Presbyterianism had a key role to play in retracing the steps of Dort and Westminster.

Spread of Calvinism in England

As Calvin became better and better known among the theologians at the English Universities he acquired an authority rivaling that of Augustine in earlier English history. "The University of Cambridge was the Calvinistic stronghold."[30] Toward the close of Elizabeth's reign (1603), however, the opposite views began to appear. The same views were to erupt in Holland with James Arminius. To settle the rising controversy the University of Cambridge sent Drs. Whitaker and Tyndal to London to confer with Archbishop Whitgift and other learned divines. At Lambeth (November 20, 1595) Whitgift drew up[31] Nine Articles and sent them down to the University for approval--henceforth to be known as the Lambeth Articles. They contained a clear and strong Calvinistic Predestinarian system, and as posterior to the XXXIX Articles and anterior to the Irish Articles they would supply the middle step in preparing for the Westminster Confession.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Mitchell, Hist. of the W.A., p. 337.

Remaining true to her father's anti-Calvinist bias, and disliking dogmatic controversies anyway, immediate resistance came from Elizabeth and she commanded Whitgift to suppress the Lambeth Articles. The controversy was not permitted to be brought up again until Elizabeth's cousin James Stuart assumed the throne. In January of 1604 at the Hampton Court Conference in the presence of King James, the Puritan leaders gathered behind their spokesman Dr. Reynolds and requested that the Lambeth Articles be incorporated into the English Book of Articles. James rudely denied the request and dismissed the Puritans deeming it better he said "not to stuff the book . . ."[32] The Reformers were to become more and more frustrated. In spite of the work of their learned theologians at the Universities, "the anti-Calvinistic reaction under the Stuarts gradually deprived them of their force in England . . ."[33]

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[31] See ibid, p. 338.

[32] Mitchell, Hist. of W.A., p. 342; cf. also Schaff, I, p. 661; and n. 165.

The Scene in Scotland

Before looking to the scene in Ireland and the victory of the Reformers with the adoption of the Irish Articles we take a look at the scene in Scotland. It was to play a most important role in the Westminster Assembly. The Reformation influence came to Scotland as it did to England--through a combination of Lutheran writings and through copies of Tyndale's translation of the New Testament. The first preachers of Reform were also the first martyrs. They included such men as Patrick Hamilton who had studied at Wittenberg and Marburg under Luther and Melancthon. In 1528 he was burned at the stake. In 1546 George Wishart who studied in Switzerland and Strasburg met the same fate. A third martyr Walter Mill predicted from the flames (August 28, 1558) that "a hundred better men shall rise out of the ashes of my bones, and I shall be the last to suffer death for this cause."[34] His prediction came partially true. The following year John Knox returned from his exile in Geneva and was to become 'the Luther of Scotland.' He had already been with Cranmer in King Edward's Court and undoubtedly he had a part (at least consultative) in the formulation of the English Articles of Religion. This coupled with his direct studies under Calvin at Geneva ideally fitted him for his task in Scotland which was to draw up a Confession of Faith for the Church of Scotland. In 1560 with John Winram and several other helpers Knox drew up the so-called 'Scots Confession.' Its content was drawn from Calvin's Institutes, or at least from Confessions drawn up under Calvin.[35]

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[33] Schaff, I, 661; cf. also Mitchell, Hist. of W.A., p. 342.

[34] Ibid.

In 1566 at the request of Calvin's chief disciple Beza, the Scotch Reformers formally testified to their agreement with the Continental Calvinistic Reformers by approving Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession, Calvin's Catechism, and the Heidelberg Catechism.[36] Thus the Reform was well established in Scotland. Its Calvinistic roots were even more direct and rudimentary than in England. As in England opposition would arise from within Calvinism concerning the doctrine of Predestination and two schools would form--those favoring a more strict Calvinism (even supralapsarian Predestination), as opposed to the milder and more popular Predestinarians who followed Davenant and Ussher of Ireland along with the greater majority of English divines.

The Scene in Ireland

At the beginning of their Reform the Irish followed the more moderate English reformers. Thus in 1566 they adopted a Brief Declaration, the XII Articles of Religion, which were essentially the same as the provisional English Articles--drawn up for Elizabeth by Archbishop Parker in 1559 while awaiting the XXXIX Articles. As it is more probable than not that the Irish did not at this time adopt the Elizabethan XXXIX Articles,[37] the XII Articles are presumed to be the Confession of Faith for the Irish Reformers until 1615.

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[35] See British and Foreign Evangelical Review, 1872, pp. 92-95, cited in Mitchell, Hist. of the W.A., p. 347.

[36] Schaff, I, 682.

But in 1615 at the first Convocation of Irish Protestant clergy the Reform picked up pace. Impressed by the Lambeth Articles and led by men like Travers, Ussher, and Davenant, the Irish Reformers now wanted a more updated and more 'Reformed' Confession of Faith.

Being that they were more remote from the absolutist Monarch, they were able to achieve what had been denied to the English Reformers at Hampton Court eleven years before. Under the primary authorship of James Ussher, at the time head of the theological faculty at Trinity College Dublin (soon afterwards to become Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland), they drew up a new Confession, the Articles of Religion. Ussher, writes Schaff, "was the greatest theological and antiquarian scholar of the Episcopal Church of his age, and was highly esteemed by Churchmen and Puritans, being a connecting link between the contending parties."[38] The Irish Articles presented a succinct calvinistic system of doctrine under nineteen headings (104 articles). Schaff describes them as follows:

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[37] See Schaff, I, 662.

> They incorporate the substance of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Lambeth Articles, but are more systematic and complete. They teach absolute predestination and perserverance, denounce the Pope as Antichrist, inculcate the Puritan view of Sabbath observance, and make no mention of three orders in the ministry, nor of the necessity of episcopal ordination. In all these particulars they prepared the way for the doctrinal standards of the Westminster Assembly.[39]

By this time the lineage of the Westminster Confession is becoming more clear. We can see now why it has been called a consensus document. We have watched the consensus building--Cranmer (Knox, etc.) in the Edwardian Articles, Jewel (Peter Martyr, etc.) in the Elizabethan Articles, Whitgift and the best from Cambridge in the Lambeth Articles, and now the best of Ireland (and reputedly the best in all England) in Bishop Ussher's Irish Articles. It is no surprise that the Westminster divines would choose and build upon a model which already represented so great a consensus.

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[38] Ibid., p. 663.

[39] Ibid., pp. 664-65.

The Synod of Dort

On the Continental scene Holland now presents us with the famous Arminian controversy from which eventuated the Synod and Canons of Dort. Even King James permitted English divines to attend. While not representing a universally proclaimed Reformed Confession the Canons of Dort nevertheless " . . . have for Calvinism the same significance which the Formula of Concord has for Lutheranism."[40] Schaff explains, telling us that "both are consistent and necessary developments, . . . [both] exerted . . . conservative influence, . . . prepared the way for a dry scholasticism . . . [with] subtle abstractions, . . . consolidated orthodoxy at the expense of freedom, sanctioned a narrow confessionalism, and widened the breach between the two branches of the Reformation."[41]

James Arminius or Jacob von Hermanns [1560-1609] studied under Beza at Geneva and then became Professor of Theology at the University of Leyden. At first he was a strict Calvinist like his Master. But while defending Calvinism against the writings of Dirik Volckaerts he became a convert to the doctrines of freedom of will and universal grace. Consequently he denied the decree of reprobation, moderated the doctrine of original sin, and proposed to change the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism accordingly.[42] "His views on anthropology and soteriology," writes Schaff, "approached those of the Melancthonian school [and] his tendency . . . was toward a latitudinarian liberalism. . . ."[43] A year after Arminius' death (1609) one of his followers, Uytenbogaert, drew up a 'Remonstrance' signed by forty-six ministers. It consisted of a negative part and a positive part each with five propositions. The negative propositions rejected five Calvinistic propositions on Predestination.[44] The five positive articles opted for: (1) conditional predestination; (2) universal atonement (Christ died for all); (3) saving faith; (4) resistable grace; and (5) the uncertainty of perserverance.[45] (It will be interesting to reflect back upon this 'remonstrance' as our history unfolds. It now seems to be the near universally accepted version of predestination in modern Reformed Theology.)

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[40] Ibid., p. 515.

[41] Ibid.

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[42] See *ibid.*, pp. 510-11.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 511.

[44] See *ibid.*, p. 516: "The Doctrines rejected are: (1) That God, . . . even before the creation . . . foreordained some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation, without any regard to righteousness or sin . . . (This is a supralapsarian view). . . . (3) That Christ died, not for all men, but only for the elect. (4) That the Holy Spirit works in the elect by irresistible grace, so that they must be converted or saved . . . (5) That those who have received this . . . grace can never totally and finally lose it, but are guided and preserved by the same grace to the end."

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 517.

The Canons of Dort responded both to the five negative points and to the five positive. The positive Canons (implying the negative ones) give us ground for comparison with the above 'Remonstrance':

> (1) Of Divine Predestination. Since all . . . sinned in Adam . . . that some receive the gift of faith from God, and others not, proceeds from God's eternal decree of election and reprobation. . . . This decree of reprobation . . . by no means makes God the author of sin . . . but declares him to be an awful, . . . and righteous judge and avenger. (Cat., Ch. I, art. 15)
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> (2) Of the Death of Christ (Limited Atonement). . . . The saving efficacy of the atoning death of Christ extends to all the elect . . . But, intrinsically, the sacrifice and satisfaction . . . is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world . . . And, whereas many who are called . . . do not repent nor believe . . .; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered.
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> (3 and 4) Of the Corruption of Man, his Conversion to God and the Manner thereof. . . . Faith is the gift of God, not . . . to be accepted or rejected at his [man's] pleasure . . . but because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.
>
> (5) Of the Perseverance. . . . Of this . . . perseverance . . . true believers . . . may and do obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion that they will ever continue true and living members of the Church . . .[46]

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[46] Ibid., pp. 519-20.

History will keep asking Dort to clarify. Concerning (2): does or does not Christ _offer_ saving grace _to all_ men? Concerning (3) and (4) will be the question of man's _freedom_. Concerning (5) will be the meaning of 'certainty' and 'freedom' relative to final perserverance.

The Arminian revolt was destined to continue and it forms part of the background of the Westminster Assembly. Though the Westminster divines softened the sharpness of the Canons of Dort, they nevertheless confessed Calvinistic Predestinarianism. This was destined to continue within the American Reformed Churches, and would be the key issue in the first revision controversy as well as being an implicit element in the 1967 revision debates. There was then and always will be a need to draw back from the hyper-logicization of the mystery of freedom-_and_-grace, and to re-emphasize the divine mercy and salvific love of God for all mankind (continuing even after man's fall!) as the predominant characteristic of the predestination mystery. But 'Calvin-logic' was destined to run its historical course--if not by him, then by his 'scholastic' followers. Westminster and Presbyterianism were heavily involved in this history.

THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

On the Eve of Westminster

For all his hatred of Puritanism James was basically a good Calvinist as far as doctrine was concerned (polity was another matter). Thus in 1619 he sent English representatives to the Synod of Dort. But all promises of liberalism toward the Reform and Reformers soon fell prey to the Stuart avarice for power. After 1625 when brother Charles was on the throne with William Laud as Chief Counsellor, Stuart absolutism with its anti-Puritanism and expedient anti-Calvinism became the negative blueprint of the English Reform. The intensity of Laud's drive for uniformity reached even Ireland which until now had been a haven for Scotch and English Puritans. In 1635 the Irish were forced to adopt the Thirty-Nine Articles "for the manifestation of agreement with the Church of England in the confession of the same Christian faith and the doctrine of the sacraments."[47] The intention of Laud was no secret; he wanted to get rid of the non-conforming 'Irish Articles'. Such was his obsession for 'unity by uniformity'. Ussher, by now Primate of Ireland, was torn in his loyalties and as a result he compromised, requiring subscription both to the XXXIX Articles and to the Irish Articles.[48] Thus on the eve of Westminster the political scene within the Church was boiling.

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[47] Ibid.

[48] See ibid.

"The" Doctrinal Question: Predestination

Doctrinally "the only question in the Assembly," writes Schaff, "was as to the logical extent to which they should carry the doctrine of predestination in a confessional statement."[49] (In our next chapter we will show that the bigger question was authority--though not recognized yet.) As in Scotland so at Westminster there were several advocates of the extreme supralapsarian schema. Dr. Twisse for example, the Assembly Prolocutor, "followed Beza and Gomarus to the giddy abyss of including the Fall itself in the absolute eternal decree as a necessary means for the manifestation of God's justice."[50] But the great majority were infralapsarian. The English divines had returned from Dort with reservations about the rigidity of expression in the Canons (and Dort for all its harshness was infralapsarian).

In Schaff's mind there was no doubt that the infralapsarian scheme of Augustine decidedly triumphed at Westminster. He concludes that " . . . [Westminster] teaches no more on predestination than the great Catholic Augustine had taught in the fourth century, as well as . . . Anselm in the eleventh and Bradwardine in the fourteenth."[51] What Westminster does do in Schaff's mind is to give a logical shape and place of prominence to the doctrine. It does not teach the blasphemous doctrine that God from eternity foreordained men for sin and damnation. "But it does teach," Schaff says, "that out of the fallen mass of corruption [=infralapsarianism!] God elected a definite number of men to salvation and 'passed by' the rest, leaving them to the just punishment of their sins. This is severe and harsh enough."[52] The explanation is truly 'harsh enough! Infralapsarianism can still be interpreted as 'passing by' some men who had only 'original sin' and not personal sin. But there is a middle-road between this and 'universalism' (everyone is ultimately saved), namely, God's universal salvific love and His universal offering of salvation to all mankind. It took a time for this aspect of the predestination mystery to be clearly articulated. On the human side it necessitated a clearer understanding of man's freedom of will.

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[49] Ibid., p. 769.

[50] Ibid. Francis Gomar (1563-1645) was the supralapsarian colleague of James Armenius, who outlived Armenius to represent his hyper-orthodox supralapsarian views at Dort (Cf. Schaff, I, 512-13).

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[51] Ibid., p. 769. Also see Schaff, I, 513, where Schaff claims even at Dort the infralapsarians prevailed. Yet at the time of the Revision controversy (1902-03) we shall see that the argument of those favoring revision builds upon no ready concession that infralapsarianism had prevailed in the Westminster Confession. Rather they argued that the Westminster Confession was supposed to be open to subscription from both supralapsarian and infralapsarian adherents, while in actuality its wording contained a supralapsarian bias.

[52] Ibid., pp. 769-70, bracket is ours. Schaff backs up his point (770): "The difference is made more clear from the debates in the 'Minutes'. Several prominent members, as Calamy, Arrowsmith, Vines, Seaman, who took part in the preparation of the doctrinal standards, sympathized with the hypothetical universalism of Saumur School (Cameron and Amyrauld) and with the moderate position of Davenant and the English delegates to the Synod of Dort. They expressed this sympathy on the floor of the Assembly, as well as on other occasions."

Westminster and the Problem of Human Freedom

With all its Calvinistic harshness the *Westminster Confession* did leave an opening. The Confession according to Schaff "expressly recognizes the freedom of will and embraces in the divine decrees 'the liberty or contingency of second causes (III, I; compare IX, 1)' . . ."[53] In this it agrees with Bullinger, Calvin, and Ussher and "favorably differs from the Lutheran *Formula of Concord*, which (following . . . Luther and Flaccius) unphilosophically represents the human will before conversion to be as passive as a dead log or stone."[54] Freedom is the necessary 'opposite side of the coin' to God's universal love and universal salvific will. To say simply that God does not cause sin does not give men enough to keep themselves and their theology from excessive harshness. The very concept of sin in its deepest sense must entail a refusal of God's salvific love. Any man who can be 'lost due to his own free sins' must from the necessary meaning of the statement itself be capable at the same time of accepting the salvific grace. Free refusal implies the possibility of free acceptance--and of course, the 'offering of the gift.' The necessary implications of this 'mystery of freedom' under grace w ere a long time in evolving.

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[53] *Ibid*., p. 771. [54] *Ibid*.

Hendry on Westminster

Not all interpretations of Westminster's predestinarianism are as kind as Schaff's. An important contemporary interpretation is that of Professor George Hendry of Princeton Theological Seminary. Hendry has the advantage of writing in the light of one hundred years more historical development than Schaff. He asserts that the doctrine as set down in Westminster's third chapter is no longer held by the Presbyterian Churches and many of them have added declaratory statements. The Westminster divines according to Hendry had used scripture texts out of context. And above all he claims their doctrine "assumes the cast of a deterministic philosophy in which there is no real place for human freedom, despite verbal protestation to the contrary."[55] "But the decisive objection," he adds,

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[55] Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 51.

". . . is that it denies the freedom of God . . . Once the decree has been fixed, God becomes, in effect, his own executor. But such a God is not eternal . . . , he is only pre-temporal."[56] The root of the doctrine lies in God's sovereign grace in Christ. It was formulated by Augustine. But "the fault of Augustine," concludes Hendry, "later exaggerated by Calvin, was that he traced the sovereignty of grace to the sovereignty of an inscrutable will, which was then absolutized and made the basis of a double predestination."[57] This will is not, however, the will of God revealed in his act of love in Christ.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Issue of Doctrinal Development

If we conclude where we began--namely, emphasizing the overall purpose of the Westminster divines--then we can see their doctrinal achievement as a success. This purpose is expressed by Briggs as follows:

> If its members had one idea more dominant than any other it was not . . . the doctrines of election and preterition . . . (for they did little more . . . than repeat what Ussher had already formulated), but that of setting forth the whole scheme of Reformed doctrine in harmonious development, in a form of which their country should have no cause to be ashamed in presence of any of the sister churches of the Continent . . .[58]

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[56] Ibid. [57] Ibid.

[58] Briggs, Hist., p. 67 citing Mitchell's Hist. of W.A., p. 127.

In this light even the controversial doctrine on predestination has served in its much-struggled-over doctrinal recording a far more general purpose. Beside setting the stage for our understanding of the American Presbyterian controversy on whether or not to revise the Westminster Confession (1890-1903), it points to the whole underlying issue involved here and elsewhere, the development of doctrine. The development in our understanding-of and expression-of this particular predestination doctrine gives us only one example of the whole developmental or evolutionary process which had to take place within Calvinism and within all Christendom. No attitude has been more harmful to Christianity than that of the static mind closed to the necessity of doctrinal growth and development.

Amid the confusion and lack of freedom of the times doctrinal statements often became defensive over-statements. History should look upon them as such and not as the maturest reflections on God's revelation nor as the best expressions of Christian faith. In this sense the protest made against Rome is certainly true: no doctrinal statement of faith is ir-reformable. 'Reform' means growth and doctrine must grow. Understanding-of, expression-of, and translation and adaptation-of our confessions of faith into a contemporary context must either progress or inevitably they will regress. On God's correlative side to the doctrinal-growth problem however there is God's infallible self-revelation to man which continues even in confused and un-free times. From this point of view the Roman claim must be understood.

Doctrine therefore is not either reformable or irreformable, either fallible or infallible. It is both . . . and in each of the two cases. This is so because there are two inseparable viewpoints: God's and man's. All human doctrinal expression is necessarily evolving and imperfect. On the other hand it has been revealed that the Word of Truth has already communicated himself to man precisely in human doctrinal terms. Human truth now shares in divine Truth--Who is infallible. This problem of doctrinal development with all its complexities (infallibility, etc.) will become the crux to American Presbyterianism.

Successes of the English Reform

First of all the English Reform did not yield to the excessively sombre and negative elements of Calvinistic scholasticism. It maintained a spirit of moderation and balance in the face of the growing continental rigidity. This spirit it passed on to the American Reform which further disowned the excesses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Secondly there was an enthusiasm to the English Reform. It consisted in the newly awakened drive for religious freedom. It asserted itself more in the practical area of polity, but eventually overflowed into the doctrinal area. The theological renaissance of our own era could only have come about as a result of earlier struggles for basic religious freedom.

We must now trace this struggle for freedom as it evolves in the English and Continental origins of American Presbyterian polity. Until a polity of freedom and toleration was born the fuller understanding of God's revelation was impeded on its receiving end. For God to give faith man must be free to respond. As we look in hindsight at the great evolution that has taken place regarding religious freedom, in foresight we are encouraged 'in this new freedom' to search for further meaning to the revelation. More specifically we are encouraged to reflect on this revelation as it regards church-polity in its relation to doctrinal-development. If doctrinal development is crucial to American Presbyterianism, the doctrine of polity and ecclesial-authority is crucial to doctrinal development.

B. ORIGINS OF PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL REMARKS

American Presbyterianism polity has deep roots in the European Reform--proximately in Britain's struggle for religious freedom, remotely in the Continental Reformers, particularly in Calvin. And yet the American Church was to evolve her own unique polity characteristics. Certainly this evolution is evident in the realm of American Church-State 'separation' as well as in her developed principles of religious freedom and toleration. Polity-wise American Presbyterianism also represented a development toward a much more broad-churchism wherein the balance of power would be far less rigid 'from the top down,' in which new emphasis would be given to the Presbyteries as the ultimate source and seat of governmental power. We have already noted in the introductory chapter that this polity-development was a real source of contention. Finally, beneath the external or governmental side of polity there is a doctrinal problem basic to all Christianity, the problem of ecclesiology. In this problem lies the connection with our previous section and also the importance of polity.

Principles of Presbyterian Polity

In spite of many peripheral disputes the main lines of Presbyterian polity are universally agreed upon. Charles Hodge expresses them clearly:

> It thus appears that the principle of liberty and the principle of order are perfectly harmonious. In denying that all Church power vests exclusively in the clergy, whom the people have nothing to do but to believe and obey, and in affirming that it rests in the Church itself, while we assert the great principle of Christian liberty, we assert the no less important principle of evangelical order . . .
>
> If it is true that the Spirit dwells in the

> whole Church; if he guides the people as well as the clergy into the knowledge of the truth; if he animates the whole body, and makes it the representative of Christ on earth, so that they who hear the Church hear Christ, . . . then, of course, Church power rests in the Church itself, and not exclusively in the clergy. . . ."[59]

These principles of polity along with other Reformation principles grew out of a protest against what was deemed to be the excessive clericalism and hierarchism of existent Christianity. First aimed at Rome, then against elements within the Reform itself, the protest struck at any excessive form of hierarchical government. Thus Hodge writes:

> . . . But to be the Vicar of Christ, to claim to exercise his prerogatives on earth, does involve a claim to his attributes, and therefore our opposition to Popery is opposition to a man claiming to be God.
>
> If it is a fearful thing to put the Pope in the place of Christ, and to make a man our God; it is also a fearful thing to put erring men in the place of infallible apostles, and make faith in their teaching, and submission to their authority, the condition of grace and salvation.
>
> From this awful bondage, brethren, we are free. We bow to the authority of Christ. We submit to the infallible teachings of his inspired apostles; but we deny that the infallible is continued in the fallible, or the divine in the human.[60]

(An editorial reflection: At this point we interrupt the historical survey and offer the following 'signpost' reflection. The basic issue involved here is the doctrine of authority and the need for its development. Within this problem is another: the application or non-application of the 'incarnational-principle' (humanity and divinity united) to the contemporary Church as opposed to the apostolic Church. If we concede a contemporary divine influence by the Spirit then the question becomes: how so? in what manner is the human-divine union effected?)

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[59] Charles Hodge, "What is Presbyterianism?" An Address (Philadelphia: 1855), pp. 15, 21-22, 26 (italics ours).

[60] Ibid., pp. 52, 60 (italics ours).

Hodge completes his outline of Presbyterian polity by gathering together for us its fundamental principles. Implicit in Hodge's comments will be the key polity issue of Westminster and in later American Presbyterianism[61]--the *jus divinum* as opposed to the *jus humanum* nature of Presbyterian polity. According to Hodge[62] two fundamentals stand out: (1) the substantive role of all the people of God in the activity, and so government, of the Church; and (2) the *inter*dependence of separate congregations of believers as one Body of Christ. For Hodge these principles were *jus divinum*. The genius of American Presbyterianism would be to create a practical working structure for them. No present denomination would deny the 'bare-boned principles.' But history records a bloody struggle concerning their concrete implementation. There is also a further problem when one comes to Hodge's _negative implications_ drawn from the principles: _no_ episcopacy, _no_ papacy, _no_ infallibility. The very fact that they are given as _negative absolutes_ brings them under the judgment of the _semper reformanda_.

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[61] There seems to be an evolving tendency in American Presbyterianism away from any notion of the *jus divinum* mentality. It is traceable in the 'broad-churchism' of men like Briggs in the 19th century, Loetscher in the 20th--indeed, in many at the close of the English Reform, as will be shown in this section.

[62] See Hodge, *art. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

Presbyterian Polity Seen in Its Total Context

One final note on Presbyterian polity which we borrow from Charles Briggs: "Presbyterianism is vastly more than a system of Church government: it embraces distinguishing features of doctrine, worship, and life. It is not a departure from the Christianity of the ancient . . . Church. It is rather the culmination of the development of Christianity from the times of the apostle until the present day."[63] Even though we must proceed step by step it is important to keep this total view in mind. Presbyterianism is more than her principles of polity. It is a living, confessing, growing branch of the one Vine of Christianity--Christ's mystical Body. Like other Christian branches it has unique features and emphases. A key problem is to be able to distinguish the 'unique features of the branches' from the 'essential features of the one Vine' from which all branches take and give life. By whom and by what process is the distinction to be made? At least all Christian Churches are agreed that the work of understanding these features and preaching them with ever new clarity must be an ongoing-developmental process. The responsibility is shared by one and all. Each 'branch' must reflect, discern, and disclose its discovery to the others. All must prune away dead twigs in order that the life-giving-Truth of the one Vine may give new fruitfulness.

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[63] Briggs, _Hist_., p. 4.

The 'Puritan Principle': Religious Freedom

All Christian Churches have gradually been discovering the 'Puritan principle' of religious freedom. It is only in our own time that Christian Churches are enjoying the fruits of this freedom. The principle is simple: "The Puritan principle forbids the imposition upon any man's conscience of things which his own conscience cannot admit to be the will of God."[64] Briggs rightly eulogizes the Westminster Confession for enunciating this principle

> . . . The unifying principle of Puritanism has been . . . the most potent force in Anglo-Saxon history; . . . changing intolerance into toleration, and checking separation by comprehension. It aims . . . at organic unity,--a unity not of uniformity, or conformity; but a unity in variety, a unity such as we find in all the great works of God . . . of

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[64] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

> life, of liberty, of progress . . . This organic principle of Puritanism is embedded in the great Puritan symbol, the Westminster Confession of Faith. 'God alone is Lord of the Conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his word . . .; and the requiring . . . an absolute blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also (XX.2).'[65]

The Westminster Confession was the first Christian confession of faith to formally express this principle of religious freedom. It was to serve as the basis for William of Orange's Act of Toleration in 1689.

The Struggle for its Recognition

The struggle for the implementation of the principle of religious freedom is a dark chapter in Christianity's history. Schaff excuses no one: "All Christian Churches . . . must plead guilty. The difference is only one of degree . . ."[66] He is sharpest in his criticism of Rome's history (hopefully improved!): "Wherever she controls the civil government," Schaff notes, " . . . she cannot consistently tolerate, much less legally recognize, any form of worship besides her own, because she identifies herself with the infallible Church of Christ . . . and regards all who dissent . . . as damnable heretics . . ."[67] Schaff's criticism would have to be more nuanced today but it is close to the spirit of Rome's struggle for four centuries. The Presbyterians were high on his list: "The Episcopalians were less intolerant than the Roman Catholics; the Presbyterians less tolerant than the Episcopalians; the Independents less intolerant (in theory) than the Presbyterians. But they were all intolerant."[68] It took a long time with much unenlightened persecution to discover that "doctrinal and ceremonial uniformity was an impossiblility in a nation of intelligent freemen."[69] Only with the Toleration Act (1689) did the Anglo-Saxon race cease physical persecution and only in our own day are we beginning to understand the fullness of the Christian obligation concerning man's religious freedom.

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[65] Ibid., p. 27.

[66] Schaff, I, 801-02.

[67] Ibid., p. 802.

ENGLAND AND CHURCH POLITY

Pre-Continental-Reform

England's struggle for 'freedom' can be traced from the early rebellions of the feudal barons against the excesses of the monarchy leading finally to the Magna Carta (1215). As a result of this declaration even the King came under the civil law. In the Church-State area another occasion saw both Barons and King rebel against the excesses of Papal interference in England's economy via ecclesiastical benefices. Protective legislation was passed in the form of the Statutes of Provisors

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[68] *Ibid.* [69] *Ibid.*

(1351) and of Praemunire (1351 and 1393). In 1365 when King John was authorized by Parliament to resist payment of or from ecclesiastical benefices to the Pope, John Wyclif was most likely present at the Assembly. It was Wyclif who was to apply the freedom-principle to the sphere of religion. He "struck at the root of the authority of the hierarchy with his principle of the supreme authority of the Scriptures."[70] Many of his followers who preached the gospel to the people of England were to further advance the cause of religious freedom--some by fire and by blood. William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English 'for the ordinary people,' was sent to the stake (October 6, 1536) by Henry. His dying prayer is legend: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes."[71]

Two Parties Form in England

Once the formal break came with Rome the English Reform increased its pace. Predictably two parties arose--the ecclesiastical-conservative or 'high Church' party and the popular-progressive or 'low Church' party. "The one would keep as near to Rome as possible, the other . . . to the Reformed Churches of the Continent and a complete reformation."[72] The more conservative reformers were attracted by the spirit of the Lutheran

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[70] Briggs, *Hist.*, p. 27.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 28. [72] *Ibid.*

Reform. But with time the majority of English Reformers were to follow the progressive party into Calvinism.

Freedom from the Prince

The pope having been eliminated the struggle for religious freedom in England tangled next with the 'prince.' As far as the Church's complete subservience to the King was concerned, the initial English Reform had been no better than Europe's Reform--whether it be Luther's 'consistorial-church-government' under the German Princes or Calvin's 'theocratic-alliance' with the Civil Magistrates of Geneva. England had her own State-church modality. The King bore the title 'the only supreme head on earth under Christ of the Church of England,' although this was modified under Elizabeth in 1563. It was merely asserted that "the Queen's Majesty hath the chief power in this realm of England and her other dominions . . . whether ecclesiastical or civil . . . "[73] Gradually however the progressive reform party, soon to be known as 'Puritans,' asserted itself. They wanted to exclude from monarchical supremacy far more than the administration of the word and the sacraments. Their demands however would not be significantly achieved until after Elizabeth's reign. And even then the greatest success was to be had in remote Ireland under Archbishop Ussher whose

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[73] Mitchell, Hist. of W. A., p. 276.

Irish Articles added the "power of the keys" to the exclusions. Not until Westminster--itself summoned as subservient advisory group to Parliament--was there added to the narrow list of monarchical exclusions a bold and "definite statement of what he might [do]."[74]

Factions among the Puritans

The ensuing history records the rising antipathy of Puritans for Monarchs and vice versa. This state of affairs would achieve its peak with Charles I and his ecclesiastical-Talleyrand Archbishop William Laud. Both were to meet their end at the executioner's block. By Charles' time (1625-49) the Puritan party had three sub-groups or factions. There was a more conservative party who would compromise between presbytery and episcopacy and who maintained loyalty to the King. It included such a distinguished personality as Archbishop Ussher who had gone as far as to make a formal compromise-proposal (presbytery and episcopacy) to the King. The plan had many backers but was ahead of its time. Secondly, there was the majority strict-Presbyterian or Convenanting Group. They favored a limited or constitutional monarchy. Thus they opposed the execution of Charles I and would be very influential in engineering the restoration. They were also opposed to the episcopacy and more especially to the insistence on episcopalian 'orders'. It would be this group that almost succeeded in establishing a State-sanctioned-Presbyterian form of church government. Thirdly there was the radical Puritan party, the Independents or Separatists, who were in favor of religious toleration and freedom--both from without and from within the Church. They would temporarily rise to power under Cromwell but would fall with his death in 1658 and with the Restoration in 1660. Thence they would have to await their freedom until William's Act of Toleration by which time many of them would have sought religious freedom in the New World. When peace was finally restored in England under the Act of Toleration, the Church would remain majority-wise the 'episcopal' Church, as it had started under Henry and as it remains today. This brings us to a more detailed discussion of the 'episcopacy' in the English Reform.

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[74] Ibid.

The Early English 'Episcopal' Reformers

At the beginning of the English Reform most of the key reformers were Bishops and so the ancient institution of 'episcopacy' was not at that time questioned. Many however were of the opinion that Scripture made no distinction between bishops and presbyters as they were found in the early church. And many more, though not opposed to prelacy as such, were deeply opposed to "a prelacy which presumed to govern the church without regard to the presbyters, the church, and the people."[75]

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[75] Briggs, Hist., p. 40.

Among the 'episcopal' English Reformers we must number such as Archbishop Cranmer, the key redactor of the Edwardian Articles. There was also John Hooper, the leading English Puritan of his time, who accepted a bishopric while remaining a Puritan in polity and theology. For this he eventually shed his blood. Elizabeth's favorite was Bishop John Jewel who was esteemed by Peter Martyr and other European Reformers. He was Elizabeth's redactor for the final (1571) edition of the XXXIX Articles. For this task he made free use of the Continental Reformers.

Concerning the views of the Early English Reformers on the episcopacy Schaff reports that "the most learned English divines, Cranmer, Jewel, Hooker, Field, Ussher, Hall, and Stillingfleet did not hold the theory of an exclusive _jure divino_ episcopacy and fully recognized the validity of presbyterian ordination."[76] John Knox, summoned by Cranmer to the court of King Edward, was not at that time opposed to episcopacy. Even after his return from exile in Geneva he allowed the Church to employ bishops as long as they would be subject to the General Assembly. His _First Book of Discipline_ provides ten 'superintendents _(episcopoi)_' for the Church of Scotland ". . . not to live as your idle bishops have done heretofore . . . ; but they must be preachers themselves, and such as may not make long residence in any place until their kirkes be planted . . ."[77] Calvin himself is defended by Briggs[78] against the charge of anti-episcopacy.

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[76] Schaff, I, 605.

To conclude, it was not the episcopacy itself that was attacked by the early English Reformers. It was ". . . the subserviency of the leading bishops to the encroachments of the royal prerogative, and the intrigues of the nobles; and their determination to constrain the people to ceremonies and ordinances without the consent of the presbyters, and against the conscientious scruples of the Puritan nation, which brought about their downfall."[79] This might serve as an ideal starting place for modern ecumenical research.

The Rise of the Presbyterian Puritans

The leader of Elizabethan Puritanism was Thomas Cartwright Professor of theology at Cambridge who was finally removed in 1570 for teaching that:

> (1) . . . names and functions of archbishops and archdeacons ought to be abolished. (2) . . . the offices of the lawful ministers of the Church, viz., bishops and deacons, ought to be reduced to their apostolic institution: bishops to preach the word of God, and pray, and deacons to be . . . taking care of the poor. . . . (6) that the ministers ought not to be created by the sole authority of the bishop, but to be openly and fairly chosen by the people.[80]

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[77] Briggs, Hist., p. 40.

[78] See S.P.G. Letter Book, cited in Briggs, Hist., p. 40.

[79] Briggs, Hist., p. 41.

[80] Brook, Memoir of Thomas Cartwright, London, 1845, 69, cited in Briggs, Hist., p. 42.

While in quasi-exile in 1571 Cartwright conferred with Beza at Geneva and was confirmed in his radical Presbyterianism. He returned to England with new enthusiasm for the struggle and he entered into public debate with the prelatical party especially with Archbishop Whitgift. In 1574 he was again forced to flee to the Continent. On his return ten years later he was imprisoned. Thanks to the influence of the Earl of Leicester and other powerful friends he was set free by Elizabeth. Elizabeth's true sentiments against the Reform were no secret, but needing the support of many who were favorable to the Reform she was shrewdly tolerant of it. And so in spite of Elizabeth, Puritanism was to grow rapidly in England.

One of the sore points came to be the compulsory use of _The Book of Common Prayer_. The Puritans protested that such liturgical accretions were _against Scripture_. They took their stepping-off point from Article VI of the _Elizabethean Articles_: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith . . ."[81] Relying on this Article VI the Puritans "contended that the Romish and unscriptural things should be removed from the Prayer Book."[82] In 1584 a new Book of Discipline was submitted by Cartwright and Walter Travers to a Synod in London, and by 1590 it "had been subscribed to by as many as five hundred ministers in the counties of England."[83] Tension mounted as the Reformers began to press harder.

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[81] Briggs, _Hist_., pp. 29-30.

POLITY IN SCOTLAND AND IRELAND

Polity in Scotland

Elizabeth's reign was about to end and her cousin James Stuart, King of Scotland was waiting unwittingly in the wings. Scotland was about ready to take the limelight in the Puritan Reform. Knox's comment on episcopacy has already been reported. He argued that episcopacy was lawful yet needing great reform. In other matters Knox's Reform was not as conservative. His Book of Common Order had displaced the Mass Book while his Scots Confession of 1560 took the advanced 'Wyclifian' position on the exclusive authority of Scripture.[84] But Scotland's counterpart to the radical Thomas Cartwright was to be Andrew Melville. Melville's Puritanism went beyond Knox's especially with regard to the episcopacy, for he held episcopacy "to be unlawful [and] opposed to Scripture."[85] As a result when the Scotch Church fell under his leadership the episcopacy was suppressed and the Scottish Church "was constructed in a thorough Presbyterian system rising from the Presbytery through the Provincial Synod to the General Assembly."[86]

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[82] Ibid., p. 30.

[83] Thomas McCrie, Annals of English Presbytery, 1872, p. 106, quoted in Briggs, Hist., p. 43.

[84] See Briggs, Hist., p. 30.

King James however foreshadowed his later policy as Monarch of all England when in 1584 he restored the episcopacy to Scotland by having a subservient Parliament pass the 'Black Acts.' The effect of these Acts was to put the Church government totally under the King. At first this action drove the Presbyterians into exile, but the following year when a compromise was set up according to which the General Assembly accepted a modified episcopacy they returned to Scotland. The compromise however did not work and the conflict began anew. By 1592 the Bishops were once more ousted and a Presbyterian church government reinstated.

Things were quiet until Elizabeth died in 1603 and James added England to his domain. Within a year after taking the new throne he again reversed his policy on episcopacy when at the Hampton Court Conference (1604) the King curtly dismissed the moderate demands of the Puritan ministers,[87] and reaffirmed the position of prelacy for both Kingdoms. The Puritans left with the feeling that their cause was more desperate than ever. James played power-politics and his new principle of Church-polity reflected his game. His compromise principle became 'no Bishop, no King,' and therefore: "the Bishops must rule the ministers, and the King rule both, in things indifferent and not repugnant to the Word of God."[88]

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[85] Cunningham, Church History of Scotland, I, 439, cited in Briggs, Hist., p. 45 in footnote.

[86] Thomas McCrie, Life of Andrew Melville, I (Edinburgh, 1819), 169ff, cited in Briggs, Hist., p. 45.

[87] See Mitchell, Hist. of W.A., p. 68.

Polity in Ireland

Ireland remained the only bright spot for Puritans during James' power-politicking--most probably because Ireland did not then loom large in James' plans. In 1594 Walter Travers, associate and collaborator of Thomas Cartwright, was invited by Archbishop Loftus to become the Provost of the new Trinity College. There he trained the young ministers of Ireland in Calvinistic Presbyterianism and among his most famous students was James Ussher.[89] Travers was bolstered in his work by many of the persecuted Puritans from England and Scotland who fled to Ireland seeking greater religious freedom. In time the Irish Puritans were anxious to secure a doctrinal standard of their own--preferring a national Confession rather than the English XXXIX Articles, and more important, preferring one

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[88] Cunningham, Church Hist. of Scotland, II, 32, cited in Briggs, Hist., p. 46.

[89] By 1615 Ussher was himself Professor of Trinity College, soon to follow Travers' footsteps as Provost. In 1620 he was made Bishop of Meath; in 1623 Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland. Puritanism prospered under him and many persecuted Puritans from England and Scotland settled in Dublin and Ulster (the Scots in the latter, the English in the former). (See Briggs, Hist., p. 48.)

"which would better express the Puritan faith."[90] The Irish Parliament summoned a convocation of the clergy (1615) from which issued the famous Articles of Religion of the Church of Ireland ('Irish Articles') under the primary authorship of Travers' pupil James Ussher.[91]

BACKGROUND TO WESTMINSTER

The Stuarts Struggle for Uniformity

Meantime back in England "King James was entirely under the influence of favorites . . . [and] took delight in humiliating his Scottish subjects."[92] In 1618 the General Assembly in Scotland was pressured to adopt the Five Articles of Perth enforcing private administration of the Sacraments, confirmation by bishops, and kneeling at the Lord's Supper.[93] In 1625 when James' son Charles took the throne the Presbyterians made serious but vain efforts to have the irritating articles repealed. Charles however, like his father, was entirely under the spell of his counsellors.[94]

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[90] Briggs, Hist., p. 48.

[91] See ibid. We have already seen that Ussher incorporated the English-Puritan Lambeth Arts. into the Irish Arts. The The Scotch-Puritan influence on Ussher also leaves a few footprints. Knox's companion in exile and after his return to Scotland, Christ Goodman, was held in great esteem by Ussher, who "long treasured and repeated the pious sayings he had heard from him on his death bed (Mitchell, Hist. of W.A., p. 36.)"

[92] Ibid.

[93] See ibid., p. 34.

The King's favorite became William Laud. The soul of efficiency, Laud was rapidly promoted--first to Bishop of London in 1628 and five years later to be Primate of all England. "He was for a number of years omnipotent in three kingdoms, looking after every appointment and every executive detail in Church and State."[95] His chief zeal, and also his fundamental error, was his attempt to establish absolute uniformity in the Church. All this was in accord with his "High-Church Episcopalianism and Arminianism in the nearest possible approach to Rome . . . , and the furthest possible distance from Geneva . . ."[96] In a word "Laud was a typical Anglo-Catholic, who unchurched all non-episcopal Churches and regarded the Anglican church as an independent sister of the Latin and Greek communions . . . "[97] Parliaments were summoned by Charles in 1625, 1626, and 1629 to seek unity and order--now synonymous with 'uniformity.' In each instance they were dissolved as soon as the King found that the Parliaments were determined to redress the monarchy's civil and ecclesiastical wrongdoings. Charles' next move was to summon no Parliament whatever for the next eleven years.

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[94] See Mitchell, Hist. of the W.A., pp. 82-83.

[95] Schaff, I, 712.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., p. 716.

Already firmly entrenched in England and Scotland, the Stuart dynasty now turned to remote Ireland. In 1632 Wentworth (later the Earl of Strafford) was made the Lord Deputy and the 'William Laud' of Ireland. Within two years he summoned an Irish Convocation, which was quickly "browbeaten into adopting the XXXIX Articles."[98] Ussher, now Ireland's Archbishop and Primate (who according to Briggs was "a splendid scholar but . . . not of the heroic type"[99]) was either ignored or cowed into submission.

Thus immediately prior to the Westminster Assembly, the picture was one of growing Stuart-Laud tyranny and growing Puritan dissatisfaction. Presbyterians, the Puritan majority, whose resistance up to the time had been ordered and moderate, were now joining forces with the far more radical Independents to become together with them the Puritan champions of liberty and freedom from oppression. Once at the Westminster Assembly the positions would harden. It was now either episcopacy or presbyterianism with no longer any hope for the dialectic 'both-and.' Schaff describes the scene tersely: " . . . both parties took extreme ground . . . and claimed exclusive Scripture authority and divine right for their form of government . . . Truth and error were mixed on both sides; for the primitive government was neither Episcopalian nor Presbyterian nor Independent, but apostolic."[100] And Issac Taylor's 'truism' has its application: "Those who are sent to bring about great and necessary movements, which after a time subside or fall into a larger orbit, are left to the short-sightedness of their own minds [and] secure the accomplishment of . . . stopping that movement . . . ."[101] We need the Prophets of the moment but we need more the whole developmental process. Westminster had closed certain doors before it ever began. Possibly its restudy will hasten their 're-opening.'

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[98] Briggs, Hist., p. 52.

[99] Ibid. Much the same judgment has been passed by others on a very similar personality, Bishop John Jewel. Radicalism was so much the order of the day that it is difficult to condemn those caught in between.

The Scots Revolt

When Laud prepared a new liturgy for Scotland to replace Knox's Book of Common Order the conflict turned into revolt. On July 23rd, 1637 at St. Giles Church in Edinburgh, the Archbishop of St. Andrew, the Bishop of Edinburgh, and many clergymen assembled dutifully to introduce the new liturgy, but the congregation would have none of it and they openly rebelled. On September 20th nearly one-hundred ministers, twenty-four nobles, and sixty-six town and parish commissioners marched on the Council-house to petition against the liturgy. Charles I ignored the revolt, ordered the petitioners to disperse or stand guilty of treason, and issued a proclamation imposing the Book of Common Prayer. The "Tables" or committees-of-protest then united the entire nation of Scotland under a Solemn League and Covenant drawn up by Alexander Henderson: "an act of consecration on the part of the Scottish people . . . one of the noblest transactions of modern times."[102] The King was compelled to yield and "the Service Book, the Book of Canons, the Five Articles of Perth, and the Bishops were all overthrown, and Presbytery again came into power and trampled prelacy to dust."[103]

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[100] Schaff, I, 606.

[101] Issac Taylor, Wesley and Methodism (New York, 1852), p. 81, cited in Briggs, Hist., p. 54.

The English Puritans in their turn watched and waited. Charles summoned a Parliament in an attempt to gather sufficient strength to resist the Scots' Army which had been organized by the 'Covenanters' and at the moment were encamped at Newcastle. Parliament however took sides with the Covenanters and the desperate King was forced to sign a treaty on August 10, 1641 establishing unity between the two nations under a Church government "tending toward Presbyterianism."[104] Meanwhile the Irish Puritans had followed the lead of the Scotch and in 1641 their Parliament abolished the Court of the High Commissioner. Wentworth was sent to the block. Ireland's prelates were called to account and peace and freedom were restored.

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[102] Briggs, Hist., p. 56.

[103] Ibid.

WESTMINSTER

The Convocation of the Westminster Assembly

On the 'eve' of the Westminster Assembly the Presbyterian Puritans held the upper hand. Whereas the prelatical party had once been determined on absolutizing itself in the British Isles now it was the Presbyterians, especially the Scottish Covenanters who were determined with an equal fanaticism "to transform the British Isles into a Presbyterian Kingdom of God."[105] The English Parliamentary leaders would seek and secure the assistance of Scotland (and so of their armies!) by flattering the Covenanters' ambition: 'uniformity of Presbyterian Church government for all three nations.' In England there was no precedent for a 'General Assembly' but some such 'assembly of divines' was imperative to this unity. Wherefore on December 1, 1641 there was proposed to the King the Grand Remonstrance. Essentially it asked that there be " . . . a General Synod of the most grave, pious, learned and judicious divines of this Island, . . . who may consider . . . things necessary for the peace and good government of the Church, and represent the results . . . to Parliament . . . and receive the stamp of authority."[106] The King refused and the following summer (August 1642) war broke out between the King's Cavaliers and the Puritan 'Roundheads' who represented the Parliamentary party. At first the Cavaliers were the more successful, but upon Oliver Cromwell's appearance at the head of the 'Ironsides' the tide turned. To insure victory Parliament knew that they needed the help of the Scots. Their plan was ingenious.

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[104] Ibid., p. 57. [105] Ibid.

While the battle continued Parliament passed an ordinance on June 1, 1643 (obviously without the King's approval) " . . . for the calling of an Assembly of learned and godly divines, to meet at Westminster, . . . to conferre . . . concerning the liturgy, discipline and government of the Church of England."[107] According to Mitchell, this Assembly came at the last moment of time " . . . when such an Assembly was possible--when Conformist and Nonconformist were not yet formally separated,--when men trained in the study of the Fathers, yet familiar with the principles and tendencies of the Reformation, were not so rare as they now are,--when the Church was still under the happy influence of a marvelous revival."[108] Invited to the Assembly were, of course, the Scots.

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[106] Masson, Life of Milton, II, 327f., cited in Briggs, Hist., p. 57.

[107] Briggs, Hist., p. 57.

The Members of the Assembly

Of the one hundred and fifty members (thirty being laymen), not more than six or seven were from the rising Independent party, a few were Erastians, and the remainder were Presbyterians. Doctrinally united, polity-wise the Presbyterians were split between a more radical *jure divino* 'covenanting' group and a more moderate group who favored compromise with episcopacy according to a scheme proposed by Archbishop Ussher. "Had the moderate *episcopalians* attended," comments Schaff, "the result would probably have been a compromise between Episcopacy and Presbytery."[109] Thus one sees again how influential Ussher was even in his absence and how sorely missed was his presence. It will always remain one of history's most intriguing "futuribles", what 'would have been' if Ussher, the father of moderate presbyterianism (or, depending on one's viewpoint, of moderate episcopalianism), had been at Westminster.

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[108] Schaff, I, 736.

[109] *Ibid*.

The Demise of Episcopacy

The war between the Parliamentary Puritans and the King grew. From one side a power-struggle, from the other a battle for freedom, this conflict would play the key role in shaping the future of the Westminster Assembly. One reason we have already seen. The King's threats kept all Episcopalians from the Assembly.[110] And the result we have also seen. Puritan "radicalism triumphed . . . under the pressure of political necessity and popular indignation created by Laud's heartless tyranny."[111] Even before the actual fighting had broken out (August 1642) Parliament had forced the King (February 1642) to approve the exclusion of all Bishops from the House of Lords. A month after the fighting started (September 10, 1642) Parliament "decreed the [episcopacy] out of existence . . . to take effect November 5, 1643"[112]--only five months after the Westminster Assembly convened. In effect the old church structure of episcopacy was destroyed even before any new structure could be suggested. Such was the triumph of Puritan radicalism. The second reason, subsequent and definitive, was the expedient alliance of Parliament with the Scots who had already humiliated the King. The Scots influence on Westminster was decisive. What was lacking to the radicalism of the English Puritans was supplied by the Scotch Covenanters.

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[110] See Schaff, I, 733.

[111] _Ibid_., p. 734.

[112] _Ibid_. The ordinances were not passed until October 9 and November 16, 1646.

The Influence of the Scots on Westminster

By summertime 1643 Parliament saw their cause in dire need of the alliance and the price was high. Against their own preference the English Parliament was forced to swear not to the civil alliance they had sought but to a religious alliance--the Solemn League and Covenant. On September 25, 1643 the members of both Houses of Parliament along with the divines of the Westminster Assembly swore their oath. The Covenant was then sent out to the counties to be subscribed-to by the people. From that day forward all were bound

> . . . to the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, against our common enemies . . . [and to] the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, according to the Word of God, and the examples of the best reformed churches; . . . [so that] the Churches of God in the three kingdoms [might come] to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church government, direcdory for worship and catechizing.[113]

Thus England and the Westminster Assembly were on the way to becoming "Covenanters," willingly or not. The "four points of uniformity" from the Solemn League and Covenant were from now on to direct the practical course of action of the Westminster Assembly: confession of faith, form of church government, directory for worship, and new catechizing document. "The significance of the Solemn League and Covenant was," according to Warfield, " that it pledged the two nations to uniformity in their religious establishment . . . on the model of . . . the Church of Scotland."[114] History would soon tell just how willingly the English subscribed to this union.

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[113] See Scotch edition of Westminster Confession (cf. Warfield, art. cit. (infra No. 114), p. 194.

Deep down in its heart, the English Parliament remained 'Erastian,' and jealously guarded its ultimate authority over the Assembly (which was never let forget that it was an 'advisory board'). But on their part the Scotch commissioners knew equally well that Parliament needed badly the support of the Scotch army. And the Scotch commissioners, though not deliberative members of the Assembly, had in the concrete a heavy influence on the content as well as on the agenda. As theologians and church lawyers their ideas were respected and even sought after by the Westminster divines. As treaty commissioners they had to approve the documents before they were submitted to the both Houses of Parliament for final adoption. In this sense the Scotch commissioners were more often than not a powerful asset to the divines.

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[114] B. B. Warfield, "The Westminster Assembly and its Work," The Princeton Theological Review 6 (April 1908), p. 200.

The Assembly fulfilled the expectations of the Scots. And vice-versa, the Scots' arrival efficiently expedited the whole course of the Assembly. It need only be pointed out that two weeks after their arrival the original plan of revising the XXXIX Articles (certainly a more conciliatory venture) was scrapped in favor of the four point program of the Solemn League and Covenant. This mandate brought the Assembly to the very brink of concrete implementation of the Presbyterian church polity as we will now see.

The 'Practical' Directory of Church Government

Even before they began work on the Confession of Faith the Westminster divines started work on the Directory of Church Government. We recall that the die had been cast for the death of the episcopacy even before the arrival of the Scots. The only remaining task for the Assembly, polity-wise, was to decide on the type or degree of Presbyterianism that should be proposed. The prejudice of the Scotch commissioners on this matter was no secret, nor was it any more a secret that Parliament adamantly opposed the *jure divino* Scotch Presbyterianism (Melville's 'high-Presbyterianism').[115] The English Parliament, a child of its time, was thoroughly and consistently Erastian. They saw themselves as the ultimate source of authority--even, nay especially in the matter of the externals of church government.[116] On its part the Assembly of divines in the light of advances so laboriously won through a long and painful history maintained an equal adamancy in favor of their own spiritual jurisdiction. They "insisted that Christ had instituted in the church a government and governors-ecclesiastical distinct from the civil magistrates."[117] Parliament did not give their approval to this principle when the Confession's XXXth Chapter was proposed to them. Nor did they ever do so thereafter.

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[115] See *ibid.*, p. 199.

The Westminster divines now put a premium on getting the Presbyterian framework established. Thus in spite of the fact that the _jure divino_ party had won the vote they decided upon a 'practical' compromise to win over Parliament. The theoretical issue of the divinely appointed and scripturally founded Presbyterianism (the _jus divinum_) was delicately shelved and _A Practical Directory for Church Government_ was drawn up under the leadership of Alexander Henderson[118] (the Scotch commissioner and author of the _Solemn League and Covenant_). It was presented to Parliament July 7, 1645 with full details for the actual concrete framework of a Presbyterian Church government. On August 19, 1645 Parliament passed an ordinance giving

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[116] See _ibid_., p. 358, n. 74. [117] _Ibid_., p. 360.

[118] See Mitchell, _Hist. of W.A._, pp. 267-68, who asserts that this Directory was largely taken from Henderson's _The Government and Order of the Ch. of Scotland_.

> . . . directions of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, . . . for the electing and choosing of Ruling elders in all the Congregations and in the Classical Assemblies for the cities of London and Westminster and the several counties of the kingdom, for the speedy settling of the Presbyterian Government.[119]

All haste was being made in formulating these ordinances "until July 22 [1646] when they were ordered by the Commons to lay aside other business and apply themselves to the Confession of Faith and Catechism."[120] Although it was resumed after the completion of the Confession and Catechisms (in 1648), the matter of implementing the Presbyterian polity was never to be completed. With the take-over by Cromwell and the Independents the opportunity never again arose. This was how close history came to giving us the Presbyterian-Church-of-England.

WESTMINSTER AFTERMATH

Presbyterians under Cromwell

Just before Cromwell's '*coup d'etat*' a group of radical London Presbyterian ministers met without formal approbation in the so-called *Provincial Assembly of London* and they issued several important documents in opposition to both the Erastians and to the rising Independents. The most important statement was their _jus divinum_ proclamation:

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[119] Briggs, *Hist*., p. 64.

[120] *Minutes of the W.A.*, p. 558, cited in Briggs, *Hist*., p.66.

> There _is_ a _Church government of divine right_ under the New Testament, . . . a spiritual power or authority derived from Jesus Christ, and exercised by Church officers . . .; [and this, with regard to] . . . public prayer . . . , public ministry of the Word of God in congregation, . . . the catechetical propounding . . . of the Word . . . ; the administration of the Sacraments; the ordination of the presbyters with imposition of the hands of the Presbytery; the authoritative discerning . . . of doctrine according to the Word of God . . .; rejecting from the communion of the Church . . ."[121]

More specifically the London Assembly declared that the power of church government was seated in "Christ's own officers which He hath created _jure divino_ . . . (1) pastors and teachers; (2) ruling elders; (3) deacons . . ."[122]

At this point the iron hand of Cromwell was again to assert itself. On November 30, 1648 the victorious Roundheads seized King Charles and their intentions were clear. The King was doomed to follow Laud already long since sent to the block (1645). As constitutional-monarchists the Presbyterians opposed the execution. They were dismissed from the Parliament by Cromwell--who then created _'the Rump Parliament'_ out of the remnants. The King was tried before one hundred and fifty 'select' commissioners, judged guilty, sentenced to the block where he met his end on July 30, 1649. Throughout all the Presbyterian ministers protested and opposed Cromwell's actions. And because of this opposition the end was in sight for England's Presbyterians--with the Scotch not far behind.

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[121] Briggs, _Hist_., p. 68.

[122] _Ibid_., p. 70.

During the early days of the Protectorate the Presbyterians continued in their efforts to organize Provincial Assemblies. Actually they were successful in constituting only one such Assembly at Lancashire, and this before the King's execution. Not long after the execution however "the Presbyterian organization of the Church of England was . . . brought to a halt by . . . Cromwell and the Independents, who had assumed the authority in Great Britain."[123] In reply to Cromwell's action Presbyterians in England and Scotland immediately recognized Charles II as their King. The Scots made the King swear to The Solemn League and Covenant after which they fought under his standard--only to be hopelessly crushed by Cromwell. The English Presbyterians were now powerless without the Scotch armies and Cromwell sent eight of the radical London ministers to the Tower.

Thus the English Puritans united through so long a struggle were now bitterly divided between Presbyterians and

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[123] Ibid., p. 73.

Independents. The latter theoretically espoused religious freedom and toleration, but actually they too became caught up in an Erastian administration of the civil arm which made the logical applications of their religious toleration impossible. As a result the earlier divisions among the Presbyterians reasserted themselves, the radical (jure divino) group opposing the moderate or compromise group. These factions appeared even among the Scotch Presbyterians. One group, the 'Resolutioners', supported the King and also the moderate English Presbyterians. They were willing to compromise with episcopacy. The other group, the rigid 'Covenanters', adamantly maintained their 'high Presbyterianism'. The Resolutioners gained the control of the Scotch General Assembly until Cromwell's army again stepped in and disbanded the Assembly (1653).[124] Now was the moment for Independent radicalism. During this time the Westminster Assembly came to a quiet and insignificant end. They had nearly accomplished their fourfold unity.

The Restoration: New Struggle in England

Oliver Cromwell died September 3, 1658 at the peak of his power. He was succeeded by his far less capable son Richard. Immediately the opportunity for 'reaction' was seized. Presbyterians now joined by Episcopalians from all three kingdoms united in demanding the restoration of Charles II who had been in exile since Cromwell's defeat of the Scots. From his exile in Breda, Charles came to terms with General Monk. He granted a general pardon and promised religious toleration. Presbyterians returned to their seats in the 'Long Parliament.' The King was enthusiastically invited to take back his throne and he entered London amid great joy on May 29th, 1659.

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[124] Ibid., p. 74.

At last it seemed agreed upon by all that the best national Church government in England, granting a National Church had to be, would be a combination of moderate Presbyterianism and moderate Episcopalianism. Ussher's dream had now come true. Rallied round Richard Baxter the moderate Presbyterians, who now included the majority of the London ministers, after three weeks discussion at Sion College proposed to King Charles II a church government structured on the basis of Ussher's Reduction of Episcopacy unto the form of Synodical Government. This would be the perfect place for a happy ending. But there was still one party which had not yet had its chance at radicalism.

The radical Episcopalians had gathered forces about their restored King and for them Ussher's 'reduction' was going in the wrong direction. Being the only party with venom unspent they now sought redress for their nearly twenty years of humiliation (recall how the episcopacy had been decreed dead at the beginning of the Westminster Assembly). In 1660 after he had heard-out both sides a temporary conciliatory Declaration was formulated by the King--faithful to his promise of toleration. As a result Dr. Reynolds the moderate Presbyterian, was made Bishop (an 'honor' which Calamy and Baxter declined). Hostilities however were not far beneath the surface and soon the occasion arose in the presence of the old favorite, the Book of Common Prayer. The restoration of the 'High Church' was the uncompromisable goal of the new episcopal radicals. Moderation once again seemed doomed to fail.

On April 15th, 1661 the King summoned a conference at Savoy to settle differences with twenty-one Episcopalians meeting with twenty-one Presbyterians. The latter were commanded to represent their complaints and requests for amendments. And this they did, "making eight points against the Prayer Book, with which it was sinful to comply."[125] Two months passed (July 25) with nothing accomplished save the heightening of the differences, whence an appeal was made to the King. The new Parliament however swung to the favor of the Bishops and on May 19, 1662 the Act of Uniformity was passed with Royal assent. This Act "required not only from ministers, but also from all schoolmasters, absolute conformity to the revised Liturgy and episcopal ordination, or reordination.[126] The radicals had won again--with a vengeance. High Episcopacy was returned to England, William Laud was avenged, and 'uniformity' was at last achieved.

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[125] Briggs, Hist., p. 82.

More than two-thousand Puritan Rectors (one-fifth of those in the entire Church of England) refused to sacrifice their principles and were expelled from the Church. Again the Church was divided into Conformists and Non-conformists--this time to stay. Among the moderate Presbyterians there were many who did conform, the so called 'Broadchurchmen' or latitudianarians. And among these were many learned young men--in fact the whole class at Cambridge. These men were to carry on the Puritan-struggle 'within' the Church of England. They would soon produce the Low-Episcopal or Evangelical-Episcopal Church, and later on Methodism.

Charles meantime did make a token-effort to pass a Toleration Act but Parliament refused. And so, another Stuart King followed the line of least resistance and Presbyterianism ceased to exist. In the face of persecution many Puritans (Presbyterians and Independents) would seek their religious freedom in the 'new world.' In England the radical Episcopalians now gave full vent to revenge, and Puritans everywhere were the target of their hatred and persecution. "Cromwell himself . . .[was] dug up January 29, 1661, . . . dragged to Tyburn, hanged, decapitated, and buried under the gallows. . . . [His] head was planted on top of Westminster Hall."[127]

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[126] Schaff, I, 722. Briggs, Hist., p. 83, adds that "all clergymen should . . . subscribe to a formula embracing: (1) the passive obedience oath; (2) an oath of conformity to the Liturgy; and (3) an oath renouncing the Covenant."

William of Orange and Toleration

The Puritan persecution continued until Charles' death in 1685. As once before in Ireland so now in England it took an outside element to bring Protestants together. This time it was the threat of Catholicism. " . . . Charles . . . sent on his death-bed for a Romish priest . . ." and James "openly professed his conversion to Romanism . . . and opened negotiations with Pope Innocent XI."[128] At James' threat to re-establish popery "the Presbyterians in Great Britain arose as one man. They forgot all the injuries. They preferred prelacy to papacy . . ."[129] It was the Puritains who constituted the active force in the overthrow of James. The long Stuart dynasty was at last over and William, Prince of Orange, husband to James' eldest daughter Mary was invited in 1688 to rule England. With William we come finally to our denouement. Moderation had its day at last. The Act of Toleration (1689) "broke up the reign of intolerance, and virtually destroyed the 'principle of uniformity.' The Act of Uniformity of 1662 . . . was confined to the patronized State Church."[130] Presbyterianism was once again granted toleration in England and Ireland and in Scotland the established Church was restored. "Uniformity had proved an intolerable tyranny, and had failed."[131] Religious freedom was not yet total, but was well on its way.

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[127] Stanley's Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey (3rd ed., London: 1869), pp. 191, 247, 320, as cited in Schaff, I, 723.

[128] Schaff, I, 724.

[129] Briggs, Hist., p. 85.

[130] Schaff, I, 725.

CONCLUSIONS

Contributions of Puritanism

The essential struggle of Puritanism, that wherein and whereby the English Reform pushed forward the Continental Reform and prepared the way for 'the American Reform', was the struggle for religious freedom and toleration. And herein lay its success and the Spirit's gift. The same gift was granted to the Roman Catholic Church three-hundred and twenty years later in Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom. Puritanism was a necessary step to all further development as Schaff tells us:

> Limited toleration opened the way for full liberty and equality of Christian denominations before the law; and from the soil of liberty there will spring up a truer and deeper union than can be secured by any compulsion in the domain of conscience, which belongs to God alone . . .[132]

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[131] Schaff, I, 725.

[132] Ibid.

Contributions of the Westminster Standards

As for the Westminster Standards even though they were cast aside "their theology lived on in the Episcopal Churches of England and Scotland in the teaching of Reynolds, Conant, Wallis, Hopkins, and Leighton . . ."[133] Bunyan's Baptist brethren substantially adopted the Standards. So did the Independents or Congregationalists who brought them to New England as their proud heritage. Our historical survey will show the indebtedness of American Presbyterianism to Westminster and how it continued the struggle to apply the principle of religious freedom not only to other denominations, but also within one's own denomination.

Ecumenical Perspectives: Development and Openness

On the ecumenical level the principle of religious freedom gives us the humanly necessary milieu in which the Spirit works. The principle of freedom is a necessary part of the more general principle of development and reformation. For the first time in our own era we are beginning to see the unity that all Christian Churches already have--even though each is a truly unique Branch of the one Christ-Vine. At the time of Westminster, Richard Baxter pointed to this 'spiritual unity: "Men that differ about bishop, ceremonies, and forms of prayer, may be all true Christians . . . if they be practically agreed in the life of godliness and join in a holy, heavenly conversation."[134] And this 'spiritual unity' urges us toward doctrinal-unity.

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[133] Mitchell, Hist. of the W.A., p. 468.

Doctrine is the understanding-of faith or of revelation-received. The 'total-revelation' is given in and to Christ and will be offered to all men--somehow, somewhere, sometime. The process will always involve the Word, the Spirit, and the Church. But the 'total revelation' (Christ) must always be received limitedly and imperfectly, in a growing and developmental way. Our human understanding, even when illumined and elevated, sees and yet does not see. There is always more to see and one can always see more perfectly. And as it is with each individual so it is 'corporately' with each Church, each 'living Branch' of the one Christ-Vine. The truth-of-faith understood by each is the one Truth--yet the understanding is uniquely limited for each. None possesses the full understanding of the revelation. Faith is of its nature perfectible.

It will be under the egis of the principle of development that we will now endeavor to conjoin Presbyterian polity and doctrine. In attempting this union one is conjoining revelation-faith with the Church. By consciously reflecting on the revelation experienced and received in itself each

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[134] Schaff, I, 726, quoting Baxter's "Vain Religion of the Formal Hypocrite," Works, XVII, 80 (see Orme, Life of Baxter, 160).

Church constitutes by the authority of its relationship with Christ an actual part of the total development. In the combined reflection of all the Churches and of all individual Christians we have the reflection of the 'corporate-Christ' on its own reality, as the one Vine living and revealing the Father to all mankind. Thus the 'corporate-Christ' is constantly reflecting on its own mystery precisely as communicating itself 'developmentally.'

CHAPTER TWO

ORIGINS OF THE AUTHORITY PROBLEM

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Religious freedom from the State was a fact and now Presbyterianism turned to the struggle for the necessary freedom 'from within' the Church. This freedom would entail (1) the freedom for each Church to confess her own faith within her own bounds; and (2) the freedom to go beyond given bounds to allow for progressive development in the understanding of her faith and in its confessional formulation. No Confession or Creed should be permitted to stifle or limit the freedom of man's spirit which is made to respond to God's Spirit. This pursuit of religious freedom conjoins doctrine and polity and involves them as its necessary constituents.

The freedom problem brings us also to the problem of authority. Freedom is not exhausted with its aspect of 'freedom-from.' It also entails the element of 'freedom-for.' In this aspect freedom expresses itself in response to, or in search for, some ideal or goal. In our faith-context the response is to the personal call or invitation of God's Spirit. Man is invited to know and to love Truth and Love. Of its nature this invitation bears 'authority'--but it is always the authority of an invitation. This authority problem also encompasses doctrine and polity--revelation in the living church.

Our historical inquiry into this freedom-authority problem as it applies to Presbyterianism will now cover its origins in the Reform period--first (A) in its Continental phase and then (B) in its English phase. These will form the background for the American scene whose inquiry will follow.

A. THE CONTINENTAL REFORM ON AUTHORITY

LUTHER ON AUTHORITY

Wyclif's Principle

John Wyclif struck at the root of the authority problem with his principle of the supreme authority of the Scriptures. There would be quite a time-lapse however before the radical Puritans took up the Wyclifian sola Scriptura and carried it to its logical extreme.[1] In between Wyclif and the Puritans came the Lutheran and Calvinist interpretations.

Luther and Melancthon: On Scripture in General

Both Luther and his disciple Melancthon maintained the supreme authority of the Bible, "but the Lutherans went with the Bible as understood by Luther, the Philippists with the Bible as explained by Melancthon."[2] The Lutheran faction "looked up to Luther as an almost inspired apostle, and believed in his interpretation as final; the latter revered Melancthon simply as a great teacher, and reserved a larger margin for reason and freedom."[3] In this sense Luther left himself open to accusations of subjectivism. Southgate describes Luther's position:

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[1] We saw in the last chapter the growth in the radical use of this principle by the early English Puritans and by Knox and Melville in Scotland.

> Although he had found the answer to his own deep spiritual struggle, the key to his answer was actually that part of the Bible which he believed to be the core of Paul's teaching, "the message of salvation through Jesus Christ that Paul preached." This to Luther was the Gospel, this was the "principle of authority" to which he always turned, not only in his judgment of the comparative validity of the books of the Bible but in their interpretation as well. . . . The Bible, so understood and interpreted constituted a body of objective truth. But to anyone who might not follow Luther, the authority for interpretation must appear altogether subjective.[4]

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[2] Schaff, I, 267.

[3] Wyndham M. Southgate, John Jewel and the Problem of Doctrinal Authority (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 163.

[4] Ibid. Southgate writes (ibid., pp. 111-12): "Luther appears to have felt no need to cite an authority for an interpretation of the Bible in the sense of an authority external to it, such as tradition or an institution. The meaning of the Scriptures was clear to him beyond the possibility of dispute. He approached the Bible with an unquestioned faith in his own understanding of its central message, the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, and through St. Paul, as through a lens, he felt that he could read the Scriptures clearly and with complete authority." Cf. R. E. Davies, The Problem of Authority in the Continental Reformers (London, 1946), pp. 27-29.

Here we see the first shadows of Reformed 'confessionalism' as interpretative of Scripture.[5]

Luther and the "Two Protestant Principles"

The Lutheran 'sola scriptura' must not be understood merely in terms of the 'formal(noetic) principle of Protestantism'[6] as divorced from or opposed to 'the material or life principle of Protestantism,'[7] justification by grace alone. Dr. Robert Johnson, for one, describes the absolute need for the integration of both principles which lesson he says he learned from Luther. As with Barth his problem with authority and the efficacy of the word arose with the preaching situation. The problem lies beyond sincerity of purpose. The question asks itself: how do I know what must be said here and now? and by what authority? "I have Martin Luther to thank," Johnson says, "for the most penetrating insight that came to me as I struggled with this problem during the first years of my ministry. It was the releasing feeling that *our theology and our preaching*, no less than the moral side of our lives, are justified by faith."[8] Johnson regrets that most Protestant laymen "are largely unconscious . . . that there is an alternative between blind acceptance of a heteronomous norm, and an autonomous rejection of any theological authority whatsoever."[9] He blames Protestants for permitting the opinion to prevail. At anyrate we shall see that the failure to integrate the formal and material principles of Protestantism--word and Spirit--had a long and sad history equally tragic with the failure to integrate these principles of doctrinal authority (word and Spirit) with ecclesial authority (word and Spirit _in the Church_).

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[5] See *Ibid*.

[6] Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism* (Tr. by John W. Nevin; Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1964), p. 225, n. 41.

[7] *Ibid*., n. 39.

[8] Robert C. Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology*, p. 9 (italics ours).

In brief then Luther bequeathed a rich legacy which was destined to be misinterpreted. He did orientate theology under the authority of the Bible, but in a uniquely free way which our own era would describe in terms of the "functional" or "witness" aspect of the Bible. Thus Johnson qualifies orthodoxy's claim of Luther in support of their dichotomized 'material versus formal principle.' "Luther," he claims, "left the matter intrinsically unsystematized in this direction. His legacy had a part in preparing the way for this answer; but this was _not_ his answer."[10]

Luther and Scriptural Scholarship

Luther accepted the Bible in its human-historical sense and championed the scholarly search for the literal sense of

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[9] _Ibid_., p. 13.

[10] _Ibid_., p. 41.

Scripture. Johnson points out the influence on Luther of the fourteenth-century Franciscan biblical-scholar Nicholas of Lyra (who taught at the Sorbonne) and calls it a happy historical accident that Luther met and followed Nicholas' hermeneutics. "Nicholas argued strongly," he says, "that the allegorical, mystical, or spiritual interpretation had been abused . . . He then proposed that all allegorical meaning would be accountable to the literal meaning."[11] At the same time Luther did not yield to the biblical-historicism that would characterize many of the subsequent biblical 'scientists.' There was always the element of revelation-faith which was essential to his theological epistemology.

Lutheran versus Reformed Tradition on Scripture

It can still be said with Dowey that: "one of the commonest devices for distinguishing Reformed from Lutheran theology is to say that the former was built upon the 'formal' principle of the Reformation while the latter derived its structure and content from the 'material' principle."[12] According to Dowey[13] there is no article in the entire Book of Concord which delimits the canonical books or which identifies them with the 'Word of God' by virtue of the 'inspiration of the Spirit.' The closest to a formal doctrine of scriptural-authority comes in the Epitome of the Formula of Concord where the 'apostolic writings' are called the 'only rule and norm for judging dogmas.' Actually the Formula is more detailed about the Lutheran 'symbolical books'--a quasi-secondary canon--than about the canon itself. This brings us to the Lutheran theology (epistemology) of symbols or confessional-statements.

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[11] *Ibid*., p. 17.

[12] Dowey, *art. cit*. (Seminar paper), p. 2.

[13] See *ibid*., p. 3.

Lutheran Symbols and Scripture

The crucial question of relating symbolical books to the Scriptures is taken up in the Preface to the Formula of Concord. The 'symbols' are said to be inferior to Scripture which is the 'judge.' The Preface states that the 'symbols' do not possess the authority of a judge "for this dignity belongs to the Holy Scripture alone: but merely give testimony to our religion, and . . . show in what manner from time to time the Holy Scriptures have been . . . explained in the Church."[14] What precisely is meant by this statement in terms of authority is still a problem in our own day. In practise the Lutheran symbols are respected quasi-canonically, but the theology behind this reverence is not clearly articulated. Dowey offers a suggestion:

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[14] Ibid., citing Preface to Formula to Concord.

"The consensus of Scripture and the symbolical books is characteristically referred to as the 'unanimous consent of the Catholic Christian faith.'"[15] The whole question of consensus and confessional faith is most relevant to the authority problem, especially as related to the ongoing 'inspiratio' of the Spirit.

No Doctrine of Inspiration

A significant omission of the Lutheran symbols--which would be developed by the Reformed Confessions--was the role of the Spirit and of his inspiration in the identification of the canon. Edmund Schlink, the Lutheran expert, explains that the Lutheran interest was in the redemptive-content more than in the book. This brings us to Luther's insight into the 'gospel' as the 'inner-meaning of Scripture' and into preaching as the primary medium for transmitting the gospel. Luther's emphasis says Schlink "is on the hearing and the 'inspiration of the hearer' not on the inspiring of sacred writings. . . . Faith (the reception of the Gospel) is central in such a way that a teaching about the Bible is not clearly formulated anywhere."[16] While the Reformed tradition would call the Lutheran doctrine deceptive, the Lutheran would claim that "it shows the true motif of Lutheran theology (not the giving of a canon, but the giving of saving faith to believers), and it avoids the error of the Reformed tradition . . . 'objectivism in matters both of dogma and ethics.'"[17]

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[15] *Ibid.*, citing Preface.

[16] *Ibid.*

Concluding Remark: The Lutheran-Insight

A summary remark by Dowey is significant. It concerns the Lutheran insight. "Reformation studies," he writes, "especially in Luther and Calvin, have brought about a new climate of biblical interpretation. Chiefly the Bible is seen as an instrument of revelation under the guidance of the Spirit in the living Church."[18] This does not, according to Dowey, exclude canon and text but it does suggest that the future should emphasize more the substantive matter of faith and redemption.

CALVIN ON AUTHORITY

The crux of Calvin's answer to the authority problem lies in his theology of "word and Spirit" and of their interrelationship. "These terms," says Dowey, "express the heart of Calvin's doctrine of special revelation."[20] He cites Calvin:

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[17] *Ibid*., pp. 3-4. [18] *Ibid*., p. 17.

[19] See *ibid*., pp. 7-8.

[20] Dowey, *The Knowl. of God* . . ., p. 117; Johnson (*Authority* . . . , p. 48) makes the same affirmation: "Luther referred to the Holy Spirit as 'the simplest writer and speaker in heaven and earth,' [*W.A.*, VII, 650] and insisted that 'the Spirit is required for an understanding of the whole Scripture,

> The word itself has not much certainty with us unless confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit. For the Lord has joined together, by a kind of mutual connection the certainty of his word and Spirit so that our minds are possessed of a genuine reverence for the word when the Spirit shines upon it, enabling us there to behold the face of God; and on the other hand, we embrace the Spirit without fear of illusion when we recognize him in his image, that is, in his word.[21]

The Word and the Spirit

"The word [for Calvin]," notes Dowey, "is the Scripture, the oracles of God objectified--previously inspired and recorded. The Spirit's testimony is the present subjective illumination by which alone the Scripture is recognized for what it is."[22] In Dowey's estimation Calvin's whole doctrine of revelation rests confidently upon the correlation of word and Spirit "whereby the previously inspired oracles are identified as such [inspired] by the subjective illumination of the mind of the believer."[23] "This tends to exalt a book rather than a person as an object of faith," Dowey readily admits,"but at the

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and in the same way for an understanding of every part of it.' [W.A., XVII, 609] But Luther developed no 'regular discrimen,' or no consistent interrelation of these affirmations. Calvin wedded them inseparably, and then proceeded to chart the various stands of thought to which their juncture gave birth. The result was a systematic doctrine of "Word and Spirit," the rudiments of which were to become definitive for the vast majority of Protestants for more than two centuries." (See infra, n. 31, for the meaning of Johnson's term "discrimen.")

[21] Ibid., citing Institutes, I, IX, 3 (translation is Dowey's).

[22] Ibid., p. 124.

[23] Ibid.

same time, such a verdict as this cannot be pronounced until we have investigated Calvin's entire doctrine of faith in the Redeemer."[24]

If it can be said that Luther was almost immune to the temptation to employ the Bible in a normative and a legalistic way, then Calvin can be said to have been a little less immune. Certainly his followers were so. Dowey claims that Calvin had Luther's principle of freedom--"Christ as the Lord of Scriptures," but not having Luther's freedom from the letter and canon of Scripture he did not exercise the principle. Consequently Calvin's epistemology of faith was ambivalent: "He never fully integrated and related systematically the faithful man's acceptance of the authority of the Bible *en bloc* with faith as directed exclusively toward Christ. And in addition his 'apperception' remained on the level of verbal inerrancy."[25] Calvin never clearly integrated what later terminology called the formal and material principles of Protestantism. Dowey confesses puzzlement over Calvin's failure to maintain the reciprocity of the word and Spirit (authority of Scripture and justification by faith alone). He suggests that Calvin did not realize the serious historical criticism that was facing the Bible and that he was driven by Rome and the Anabaptists on the question of extending Scripture's authority to church traditions on the one hand and to private revelations on the other. He could combat these two only by the sole authority of Scripture. "The 'simple' meaning of a text," says Dowey, "became in his hands such an effective weapon for the criticism of the papal church that it is small wonder that he took it unconditionally for God's own authority."[26]

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[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 161. Abd-el Istafanous goes beyond Dowey and defends Calvin even from ambivalence (*Calvin's Doct. of Biblical Authority*, p. 178).

Dowey has no doubt however with regard to the overall positive value of Calvin's epistemology of faith as being not merely bibliocentric but also--and primarily--Christocentric. This Dowey clearly affirms. " . . . That both Luther and Calvin found Christ and not a book the real center and object of faith long before criticism became powerful," Dowey says, "shows that the rediscovery of the Gospel in this century by those who no longer can consider the Bible's inerrancy an axiom of faith is not a retreat, but a rediscovery of one of the deepest insights of the Reformation."[27]

Scripture Subordinate to Faith

Pushing further his analysis of Calvin's 'word-Spirit' reciprocity Dowey backs up his fundamental insight into Calvin by showing the essentially subordinate role played by Scripture in his theology of faith. Even text-ually Dowey points out that the Institutes' three chapters on Scripture (I, vii-ix) were more of a footnote to chapter vi then an integral development. Thus in I, vii, 5 Calvin says: "Before I proceed further, it is worthwhile to introduce some observations concerning the authority of Scripture . . ."[28] Calvin's full epistemology of faith doesn't appear until III, ii. The reason why Calvin's later interpreters mis-interpreted him is clear. The one noetic-office of the Spirit--"the original giving of the sacred articles by which their objective validity was acquired,"[29] became separated from the continuing-noetic-influence of the Spirit down through history, viz., "the subjective recognition by the believer of their divine authority."[30] The more isolated the doctrine on Scriptural authority became from its co-principle, the more wooden, fundamentalistic and farther away from the true spirit of the Reform it also became. Thus verbal-inerrancy by a 'dictation theory' eventually so divinized the Bible that no other 'criterion'[31] was necessary.

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[26] Ibid., p. 163. Johnson corroborates Dowey's surmise as to Calvin's motivation (op. cit., pp. 50-51).

[27] Ibid., p. 163.

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[28] See Ibid., pp. 86-87.

[29] Ibid., p. 89. See Johnson, op. cit., p. 49: ". . .The Spirit has two noetic "offices" in conjunction with the Word. It was through the Holy Spirit that God became, as it were, the "author" of the Bible. And it is through the 'testimony of the Holy Spirit,' . . . that the Bible becomes the Word of God for the church as it exists within history, for the individual Christian in his given situation, or for the Christian theologian as he formulates his theology." We note that Johnson mentions the locus of the Church.

[30] Ibid.

Modern Scripture studies would have to show that these theories were imaginative constructs, that humanly and historically speaking we don't know whether we have the perfectly correct content of the original texts nor whether we have all the content. But we are not asked to search out God's message in and through these human, limited, and imperfect records alone.

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[31] Johnson distinguishes between "criterion," "norm," and "discrimen" (op. cit., p. 14): " . . . A theological norm is assumed to be absolute or, by its very nature, to exclude the acceptance of other theological norms. The theologians of late Protestant orthodoxy were employing the term accurately when they spoke, within the context of the sola Scriptura principle, of the Bible as the "singular norm" of theology (self-authenticating and bearing its own certitido or authority).

A criterion . . . is a functional critical instrument or authority. This term was first used to designate the judge . . . in a court of law. The authority of a judge is not absolute but derivative and mediate. . . . It is assumed that theological criteria do not necessarily exclude one another. Several criteria may be employed within the same system. . . . Theological criteria are necessarily under the superior authority of a theological norm.

The word discrimen, which is used frequently, is intended to designate a configuration of criteria that are in some way organically related to one another as reciprocal coefficients. Calvin's doctrine of the Word and the Spirit may be cited as a classic example of a theological discrimen. It requires the testimonium Spiritus Sancti, or that the Holy Spirit "attest" the written word of Scripture, in order for it to be authoritative and useful for theological purposes. It also requires that the word of Scriptures be utilized to "test" the Holy Spirit or to "test the spirits to see whether they are of God (I John 4:1)."

We are given the Spirit's help. We are not asked to believe them because they are written records but always and only because of the Spirit's illumining-gift. Calvin struggled to keep the human media--word, teaching, preaching--in harmony with the mystery of Christ's Spirit. All who follow must do likewise.

Faith versus Revelation in Calvin

An important observation is made by Dowey on the shortcomings of Calvin's concept of revelation. Dowey writes:

> It might seem more appropriate to call this second problem the problem of faith. But this would be to gloss over the real difficulty which we are now approaching in Calvin's theology, the incongruity between the doctrines of revelation and of faith. Calvin's doctrine of revelation concerns itself wholly with the recognition by the believer of the authority of Scripture, while his doctrine of faith concerns the believer's appropriation of Christ. The correlate elements of the first are word and Spirit; of the second, Christ and faith.[32]

The significance of the observation lies in its further manifestation of Calvin's propensity for absolutizing Scripture as an authoritative norm. This identification of the authority-of-Scripture problem with revelation seriously narrows his theology of revelation, and logically his theology of faith too, for faith responds to revelation and is the revelational-gift-received. The two should not be dichotomized. In Calvin they were and as a result there came about the gradual build-up of a bibliolatry with 'dictation theory' et al.[33]--above all the identification of revelation with its recorded-witness.[34] It was Calvin's doctrine of Faith in Christ that kept him personally from the bibliolatry adopted by many of his followers.

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 89 (Dowey's footnote 210).

In Calvin's treatment of faith (for Dowey the key to his theology[35]) the two correlate pairs finally seem to coalesce into one unified doctrine. In personal faith the apparent dichotomy is 'integrally' resolved. Faith is seen as more than knowledge. It is seen as personal union. Dowey says it well:

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[33] Dowey (ibid., p. 99) poses Warfield's solution: " . . . probably the solution of Warfield, curious as it appears at first glance, is the best formulation for doing justice to a certain lack of clarity or variation in Calvin himself. Concerning 'dictation,' Warfield comments [Calvin and Calvinism, p. 63]: 'It is not unfair to urge, however, that this language is figurative and that what Calvin has in mind, is, not to insist that the mode of inspiration was dictation, but that the result of inspiration is as it were by dictation, viz., the production of a pure word of God free from all admixture.'"

[34] See Johnson, op. cit., p. 59: "The vital and dynamic orientation of the discrimen of the Reformers was threatened. This is why a virtual identity of the concepts 'Word of God' and 'Holy Scripture' could develop without apparent uneasiness, and the naked contention that the Bible is the Word of God could become the reigning tenet. If the weight of emphasis is shifted to the conviction that it was God who spoke in the Bible, away from the recognition that 'it is God who speaks in it,' then Calvin's 'principal proof,' which is from the person of God who speaks (a Dei loquentis persona), ceases to be the principal 'proof.'

"This shift occurred slowly in early orthodoxy and was far more implicit than explicit. When it had been made, however, it permitted the very error that Calvin had warned most strongly against, as it was no longer possible to preserve the 'inviolable union' of Word and Spirit in the full sense that he intended. As Karl Barth has observed, the church soon found itself in the role of a widow left with her deceased husband's legacy."

> . . . The believer looks exclusively at the mercy of God in Christ and at his own personal election to salvation through Christ, and thus the problem of formal authority vanishes by coalescing as it should with the 'material' of salvation, Christ. It is almost superfluous to remark that here the assurance of a personal relationship has completely transcended the problem of the authority of the sacred book. This is the true center of Calvin's doctrine of faith. It is a highly personal encounter with and experience of God's mercy, whereby the individual knows his ultimate destiny.[36]

Dowey's entire thesis develops this one insight and it shows that Calvin's theology of faith has a personal Christocentric orientation throughout.

First of all Dowey rules out any exclusion of 'knowledge' in Calvin's theology of faith. Man does not turn to God by some blind instinct, but God appeals to the highest part of his nature. "God speaks a word which man must comprehend and answer " Dowey says, "God's revelation must become man's knowledge. There is no faith, so far as Calvin is concerned, without knowledge."[37] But it is equally insisted by Dowey that "knowledge" is not the sole constituent of living-faith. He points out that God has enlightened even some of the reprobate with true knowledge of the gospel "to deepen their inexcusability"[38] and that there is a type of human knowledge of the revelatory narratives which "non believers may accept . . . without seeing Christ in them."[39] Only by a special 'inner work of the Spirit' may man 'know by faith.'

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[35] Thus Dowey sets the theme in his introduction (op. cit., ix): "It is not enough . . . to set Calvin apart from orthodoxy by emphasizing the figurative or 'as if' character of so-called dictation. Much more important, and certainly the main point in the treatment . . . is to show that both inspiration and the 'witness' of the Spirit are subsidiary in Calvin to his teaching about faith in the Institutes, Book III: Christ, not a book, is the scopus fidei."

[36] Ibid., p. 182.

A second element in Calvin's notion of faith--especially concerning its certitude--is 'hope.' According to Dowey, Calvin's certainty-of-faith is not a simple certainty. It is always involved in mystery and paradox: "in the ultimately unfathomable mystery of gratuitous election and the temporary paradox of history in which the salvation already won by Christ remains because of sin, a hope based on a 'promise' rather than a possession."[40] This faith-built-upon-hope brings us beyond intellectual knowledge into the realm of desire, affection, and of the free will of man. In faith man is invited to respond freely to the divine attraction or call.[41] This factor adds responsibility and morality to faith.

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[37] *Ibid*., p. 172, referring to the Institutes, III.ii. 10-12 and III.xxiv. 6-7.

[38] *Ibid*., Dowey's footnote 123.

[39] *Ibid*., p. 173.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 191.

Thirdly in Calvin's theology of faith there is more than knowledge, more than hope, and more than free-will-response. There is a vital, gratuitously-endowed union with Christ. Dowey compares Calvin's mystical-union of faith with the Eucharistic union:

> The union with **Christ in faith** is elsewhere explained by the eating of the flesh of Christ, which here "does not relate to the Lord's Supper, but to that perpetual communication which we obtain apart from the use of the Lord's Supper." (Com. Jn. 6:53) This perpetual communication of the flesh of Christ is the spiritual reality of which the elements of the Supper are related as "symbol" to the "thing itself" (IV, xvii. 10) or "corporeal sign" to "spiritual truth" (Ibid., ii) . . . These terms, then, are not metaphors for believing, but show that faith does much more than know of a future salvation: it participates in present life. This life is communicated by a miraculous property of the flesh of the risen Christ, which although at an immense local distance from us (IV.xvii. 10) is endued with a plenitude of life to

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[41] See Roger Aubert, Le Problème de l'Acte de Foi (Louvain: E. Warny, 1958), pp. 290-94; 317-35; 393-95; 511, 784-87. Here the author analyzes the various theories of Roman Catholic theologians trying to harmonize reason, will, and grace. Thus in his conclusion Aubert says (p. 786): "L'acte de foi est l'affirmation d'une réalité, mais d'une réalité qui est en même temps l'intervention de l'affectivité intellectuelle et de la grâce, puisqu'on n'est sensible à une valeur que si l'on est tendu affectivement vers elle par l'amour. En outre, l'adhésion de l'intelligence dans la foi n'est donnée que sous la motion de la volonté, que Dieu attire en lui, faisant voir dans l'acte de foi la condition nécessaire pour atteindre le bonheur supreme auquel l'homme aspire: fides quae est donum gratiae inclinat hominem ad credendum secundum aliquem affectum boni, etiamsi sit informis (II-II, q. 5 a. 2, ad 2^{m}, . . . "

> communicate to us. (Ibid. 9) This is the deepest significance of the incarnation: the communication of life to us by the flesh of Christ . . . (Ibid. 8-11) The mystical participation is not to be analyzed but rather experienced. . . .[42]

This union with Christ in faith is not according to Dowey a question of classical mysticism--the swallowing up of a personality in Christ, but neither is it a metaphor. It is the reality which makes a being alive in both soul and body. It clearly shows that Calvin's theology of faith even in its noetic aspect is an "existential awareness"--and far more than the approval of Scriptural propositions about God.

Faith, Revelation, and Reason

One last problem on 'faith and revelation' should be mentioned: the relationship of reason (fallen-man's reason) to faith, including the role of a natural theology and of a general apologetic in faith. This involves one's doctrine of original-sin and its effects on the noetic-nature of man. Presently there is so much contention over the theology of original-sin[43] that it seems a bad area to seek more than a generalized 'consensus.' Detailed agreement would presuppose agreement on 'nature,' 'grace,' and the nature of the 'supernaturally gratuitous'--no mean task. As far as Calvin is concerned it is sufficient that we mention some of his guidelines on the 'faith-reason' problem.

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[42] Ibid., pp. 200-204.

[43] Protestants like Reinhold Niebuhr have long challenged the traditional meaning of original sin and demythologized it. See his Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 262, 279-80.

One issue is clear. In answer to the question whether original-sin closes the door on all natural-theology, Calvin gives an insistent 'yes.' "Strictly speaking," Dowey says, "Calvin's evaluation of these elements of the revelation in creation do not belong to his 'natural' theology. _It is only from a standpoint of special revelation that one can judge properly the revelation in creation since the fall of man._"[44] Concerning the further question of reason's role in an apologetical function, Calvin's theory answered: reason's function was entirely negative, not a bridge to true-faith but a battering-ram against false faiths. "The way to preach to idolaters or philosophers," reports Dowey, "is not to quote Scripture verses, but to show them the foolishness of idolatry and philosophy--that is to say, to make clear to them that they are not living up to the light that they already have . . ."[45] What then does Calvin's faith add to reason, especially concerning the revelation present in natural creation? Calvin's answer is summarized by Dowey:

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[44] Dowey, _op. cit._, p. 83. Dowey brings up the Barth-Brunner debate on 'natural theology' in an appendix.

[45] _Ibid._, citing Calvin's _Com. Acts_ 14:17.

> The relation, thus, is one of clarification, in which scripture is a pair of eyeglasses or a guide and teacher. The special revelation of the Creator in Scripture is not a substitute revelation, a completely new picture placed before the eyes. It does not make irrelevant God's other works which Christians have objectively in common with all men, but it is an aid in understanding these works--an indispensable aid. In another figure: God repeats in a loud voice in Scripture what we can no longer hear when spoken in the ordinary tones of creation itself. . . . (Sermon on Job, CO xxxiii. 604)
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> . . . Therefore, in this specific area of revelation, Scripture is a special revelation in regard to the means God uses to reach men, but with regard to the content it is nothing else but the general revelation.[46]

This faith-reason relationship must also apply to the problem of reason's role in 'special revelation' and in doctrine (a problem which will come up often in our work).

"True Knowledge" of God

One final step remains. It is a key to Dowey's interpretation of Calvin and to the entire Christian epistemology of faith. On this point Roman Catholics are at one with Protestants: only in gratuitous faith does God truly personally reveal and give himself to man. This "faith-knowledge" (which we saw was more than knowledge) must be human in that it needs the powers of man. It is more than human however in that it is divinely illumined or en-Spirited. As such it is gratuitously salvific. It is supernaturally 'unitive'--uniting man mystically to God through Christ's humanity. For Calvin this "faith-knowledge" is the only knowledge man may have of God. Thus God the Redeemer and God the Creator are known sola gratia Christi. This is Dowey's explanation of Calvin's duplex-cognitio:

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[46] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

> Only the redeemed truly known the Creator. They, however, know him, not directly in his creative activity, but as the God of their redemption. And redemption, although coming gratuitously, comes from the Creator and operates within the orderly will of the Creator. This will is knowable in principle, from creation itself, but because of sin, is found only as part of the special redemptive revelation.[47]

Critique of Calvin's Faith-Revelation Theology

Except to mention Dowey's comment to the effect that there is a contemporary need for apologetics we leave the issue of the possible or non-possible natural theology at rest and shrouded in the mystery of concrete Christian man. It is of greater significance to repeat the warning against the Calvinistic propensity--the tendency to over-identify the personal-object of special revelation (the Word) with the written Scriptures (the word written). Such an over-divinization of the Bible is inimicable to the principle of the Reformers. It confuses the human witness with the divine revelation. It tends to overstress the humanly-recorded testimony in its static-verbal nature rather than emphasizing its inner gospel-message which is constantly unfolding itself ever old and ever new in its growing application to ever changing historical circumstances.

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[47] Ibid., pp. 239-40.

Calvin and Church Authority

Dowey has been quoted as saying: "The Bible is seen as an instrument of revelation under the guidance of the Spirit in the living Church."[48] This brings up the question of Calvin's theology of Church-authority. His tendency toward bibliolatry was a polemical reaction against Rome's ecclesiastical authoritarianism. The basic elements of church-authority however remained in Calvin's epistemology of faith. First of all Calvin exalts the place of the teacher (IV. 1. 5) who though not infallible or inspired is a learned believer capable of exegesis and Scriptural application. He has a true place in the church but subordinate to Scripture. Dowey summarizes Calvin's thought:

> The teacher had no right of 'private' interpretation, but rather the duty of constantly re-examining the church's doctrine in the light of Scripture, and vice versa. No one valued more highly than did Calvin the support of the early fathers and councils for his view, but always with the reservation that both had made errors. A counsel of scholars assembled under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is the best way of solving difficulties, but its decisions are not to be taken on a par with Scripture itself.[49]

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[48] See n. 18.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 36. Concerning Calvin and the authority of the Church, one of Dowey's pupils at Princeton Theological, Abd-el Istafanous, wrote in his doctoral thesis (*Calvin's Doctrine of Biblical Authority*, n.p., 1963, pp. 15-16): "The *sola Scriptura* principle did not mean that Calvin considered the church to be altogether void of authority. His strong doctrine of the church and the ministry makes this fact quite evident . . . He rather tried to define its limits and draw the line between it and the authority of the Scriptures. Therefore the present writer feels . . . it is more appropriate to study Calvin's doctrine of the church and her ministry than . . . his views on inspiration.

To the obvious difficulty that faith would be constantly vascillating unless 'teachers' could, at least sometimes, speak with authority Calvin answers

> I reply, there is a twofold test of doctrine: private and public. The private test is that in which every individual establishes his own faith, when he wholly acquiesces in that doctrine which he knows has come from God. For conscience will never find a safe and tranquil anchorage except in God. The public test refers to the common consensus and polity of the church. For as there is danger that fanatical men may rise up who may presumably boast that they are endowed with the Spirit of God, it is a necessary remedy that the faithful should meet together and seek a basis of agreement in a holy and pure manner . . . It is doubtless a singular work of God when he subdues all our perverseness, makes us to agree to one thing, and unites us in the pure unity of faith.[50]

This twofold test affords a wonderful "discrimen" wherein two reciprocally interrelated criteria, neither absolute in itself, are both sealed by the Holy Spirit and combine to form the theological-norm under the Spirit for the ongoing revelational process.

Besides the 'search and discover' consensus-phase one can ask of Calvin the further question: can there be some authoritative judicatory or declaratory structure in the Church to finalize the consensus-phase? In the concrete all Christian Churches have such structures--especially the 'confessional Churches.' What is needed is a more developed theology of polity, more specifically a doctrine on the structure of the church's teaching authority--its functions, powers, and limitations. The practical question for our own inquiry is: within the authority of the 'revelational-process' what kind of authority can be attributed to the church's doctrinal and confessional statements? Calvin's theology on this point was sparse. It must limit itself to his grounds for rejecting church authority as he knew it. Positive theology however often comes out of negative beginnings.

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[50] Ibid.

There were two main reasons according to Dowey for Calvin's bias against ecclesial authority: (1) in itself church authority is only the "uncertain judgment of men" (I. vii. 1) and (2) for such authority to be legitimate it must be derived from Scripture and not vice-versa. Again we are back at the reciprocality of the constituents of the theological norm (described in the next to last paragraph) precisely as requiring the seal of the Holy Spirit. Even the _consensus_ of the church considered _in itself_ falls short of giving the 'solid assurance of faith. In faith the mind, Dowey says, must be caught up 'in a transcendent kind of knowing.' He cites Calvin:

> " . . . we feel indubitably a divine energy (_vim numinis_) living and breathing in Scripture, by which we are drawn and inflamed to yield, knowingly, indeed, and willingly--but it is more vivid and effectual than any human will or knowledge . . . It is therefore such a persuasion (_persuasio_) as requires no reasons; such a knowledge (_notitia_) as that to which highest reason agrees, indeed, in which the mind rests more securely and steadily than in any reasons; it is finally such a perception (_sensus_)

> as could not be produced by anything but a revelation from heaven. I say nothing but what every believer experiences himself, except that my words fall short of a just explanation of the thing. (I. vii. 5)"[51]

Dowey concludes that Calvin's theology is neither intellectualism nor its opposite. Human reason is not distorted by faith but 'inspired' and 'inflamed' to go beyond human comprehension to the very perception of divinity itself 'in faith' or in the mystery of revelation. Thus biblical revelation is valid only when the testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti seals its witness. The same must be so concerning the testimony or witness of the ecclesial consensus. And finally (as a later chapter will discuss) the same exigency for the seal of the Spirit must be so with regard to any definitive judicatory power of the church. And in all three cases (scripture, individual reason, and faith) the total reciprocality must be guarded. The best hope for an ecumenical theology of authority and epistemology of faith appears to lie in the development of this 'discrimen' notion, reciprocal criteria under the one Spirit.

Concluding Remarks on Calvin and Authority

In conclusion the authority question as it arises from our Calvin study can be put in question form: Ought not Calvin's "word and Spirit" doctrine on authority be expanded to "word and Spirit in the living Church?" The "Gospel" was preached in a liturgical (Church-worshipping) context long before it appeared in the sacred written records. Revelation and faith were first communicated by preaching and teaching. The build-up and formation of the records was a long and tedious process; the publishing and widespread reading of Scripture had to await the printing press and the gradual education of the masses; even now Scripture scholars are struggling to unravel the human-historical elements of the Scriptures. Thus the communication-of-the Gospel (the "traditioning and revelational process") cannot and must not be limited to the Bible as book. This rigid limitation (bibliolatry) has been a mark of devolution and stagnation and embarassment to those who awakened to the discovery of the "closet" into which they had locked themselves.

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[51] Ibid., pp. 109-111.

Calvin according to contemporary scholars had the elements for a balanced solution but became too embroiled in the polemics of the moment to reflect on and develop the implications of his doctrine. He recognized that Scripture, as God's unique gift and witness to his Church, must be taught and preached--and so studied, discerned, and interpreted--in and by this Church under the Spirit. In doing so the Church itself is God's witness. He emphasized the need for teachers in the Church. He proposed the "double-test" (or criteria) with the individual's judgment the private test being subject to the common consensus of the Church (the public test). But he did not spell out their interrelationship. Rightfully he sought ultimate refuge in the testimony of the Spirit as the ultimate-ground for "faith." He did not however spell-out the obvious application of the Spirit's testimony to the "growth-toward-consensus" process although he did mention the role of the Spirit with groups of men and that the human "judgment of men" is "drawn along."

To the "intertwining of spiritualism and Biblicism" a sound theology of authority must then add the "ecclesial" dimension. Since the earliest creeds which formed the base for Scripture itself there has always been a corporate confession of faith. For a faith to be alive these "confessions of faith" must like Scripture be constantly restudied, reinterpreted, and readapted. This revision of Confessions must always take place in critical comparison with the primary witness of Scripture as understood in the entire Christian Church's development, the growing 'ecumenical consensus' from all the varied elements of the traditioning process. We will try to show later that our emphasis on consensus need not conflict with an infallible teaching authority, but that they can complement one another. One acts as a check and balance for the other. Scripture of course, as the primitive and unique consensus of the early church, must form the basis for any future consensus. That such a process of doctrinal-confessional growth must go on within the Christian Church(es) is itself broaching a point of consensus.

B. THE ENGLISH REFORM AND WESTMINSTER ON AUTHORITY

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Outline

As with the problem of doctrine and polity in general so now with the specific problem of authority, the early Episcopal phase of the English Reform can be separated from its later and more radical Puritan phase. In this case the earlier phase seems to be the more developed and the Puritan phase with its penchant for Calvinistic simplicity represents in some ways a temporary devolution.

Authority and the English Reformers in General

"The basic question," says Southgate in his work on Bishop Jewel, "had to do with the nature and definition of the Scriptures as the ultimate authority, and above all, with the authority for their interpretation of the Bible."[52] Succinctly stated "the problem of authority for doctrine comes in the end to be the problem of the authority for the interpretation of the Bible."[53] The criticism brought against the Lutheran and Calvinistic views on Scriptural interpretation was most often that of "subjectivism"--the yielding to "an endless variety of interpretations."[54] Thus the English Reformers had the double task of avoiding subjectivism on the one hand

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[52] Southgate, _op. cit_., p. 111. [53] _Ibid_.

[54] _Ibid_., p. 112, citing J.T.McNeil, _The History and Character of Calvinism_ (New York, 1954), p. 39.

and of replacing Roman authority with some other interpretative authority on the other.[55]

THE EARLY ENGLISH REFORM ON AUTHORITY

Cranmer

Whereas the doctrinally conservative Henry kept the Reform well in hand, with Edward VI it attained mercurial speed. Cranmer found himself holding back the extremists by use of the argument from authority. "As the source of authority for his views," notes Southgate, "he looked increasingly to tradition, not the late papal tradition, but the tradition of the Early Church."[56] Had Edward lived and Elizabeth not come along the English Church would have been completely Reformed. But as it turned out the Elizabethan-episcopal approach to the authority problem was unwittingly set up by Cranmer's reactionary caution. Paradoxically Cranmer's own life fell prey to Mary's revengeful extremism.

Elizabeth

The destiny of the English Reform and of the English Church fell to the churchmen who lived during Elizabeth's long reign. Elizabeth, like her father, thought little of the theoretical problem of 'doctrinal authority', but concentrated only on holding tight-rein over the practical authority. Southgate describes Elizabeth's doctrinal position as being (1) against the Roman solution which challenged the royal supremacy, (2) against the Lutheran 'consistorial' solution as totally unacceptable to the Reform party, and (3) against Calvinist theocracy as equally repugnant as the Roman solution. "The problem of interpretative authority itself," concludes Southgate, "was solved by the Elizabethan churchmen within the framework provided by the _permissive power of the civil power_."[57] Thus Elizabethan England was thoroughly Erastian.

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[55] See Southgate, op. cit., p. 116.

[56] Ibid., p. 117.

THE EPISCOPAL APPROACH TO AUTHORITY:
JOHN JEWEL AND RICHARD HOOKER

Jewel's English Point of View

Cranmer's efforts were taken up anew by Elizabeth's favorite, Bishop John Jewel. As far as authority was concerned Jewel accepted the normative authority of the Scriptures but didn't share the Reformers' faith in their self-revealing clarity. He sought for an interpretative authority someplace between Rome's ecclesiastical authority and Anabaptist spiritualism. He accepted the value of tradition but not Rome as the judge of tradition. He accepted the Protestant divine-inspiration in interpretation but insisted that it meet the test of general-consensus. "He endeavored," says Southgate, "to find an authority which was objective and whose meaning was demonstrable by reason. This . . . he found in the early Church, particularly in the writings of the fathers."[58] Jewel's was a singularly English point-of-view, namely, emphasizing the role of reason and demonstration. "Although most reformers," writes Southgate, "denied that their teachings were new, . . . it is quite another matter to stress the primary importance of demonstrating the identity of a particular modern Church with the early Church."[59] Finally, as with Calvin and for the same polemical reason, the ecclesial-aspect of his epistemology of faith was weak.

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[57] _Ibid._, p. 118.

Jewel's Interpretative-Authority by Consensus

Again following Calvin Jewel strained to avoid the extremes of biblicism and of rationalism. But unlike Calvin and like Cranmer he searched for the balancing objective-principle in interpretative-authority, conformity of current doctrine with early Church. The problem arose for him with the problem of the canon. His answer was that the canon had been settled once and for all by the early church fathers. He declared that the doctrines we hold "be cases, not of wit, but of faith; not of eloquence, but of truth; not . . . devised by us, but from the apostles and holy fathers and founders of the church by long succession brought unto us."[60] This interpretative authority was in no way meant to replace Scriptural authority.[61] Rather it was meant to be its complement by supplying "reasonable demonstration and proof" from the historico-critical side which came down to being identified with the consensus of the Fathers. This brings us to Jewel's notion of consensus.

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[58] Ibid., pp. 119-120. [59] Ibid. p. 120.

"Agreement upon the particular point by a large number of fathers must always be shown."[62] This was the first prerequisite to Jewel's theory. But the theological question was still outstanding. What was the 'inner-meaning' of this consent and what part does it play in the whole 'revelational-process?' "The 'consent of the fathers'," answers Southgate, "appears to have had for him deeper meaning than the mere numerical sum of fathers. Consent . . . was an instrument through which God had chosen to instruct his Church. 'The fathers had the spirit of understanding and knew Christ's meaning.'"[63] This notion of consensus leads in turn to Jewel's notion of tradition (including contemporary tradition) and consequently to his notion of the church.

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[60] Ibid., p. 176, citing Jewel, Reply, Works, II, 810.

[61] See ibid., p. 179. Thus the Fathers have their own literary genre (p. 181): "Jewel viewed the fathers at all times as men, not as divine oracles whose words were to be taken with complete literalness. As preachers and controversialists themselves, he pointed out, they used extreme figures of speech, rhetorical devices which were not meant to be taken literally. 'In the sway of disputation,' he stated, the holy fathers used 'oftentimes to enlarge their talk above the common course of truth,' not only for controversial purposes but with the end in view of bringing the people to a realization of higher things. (Reply, Works, II, 608)."

[62] Ibid., p. 184.

Jewel and Church Tradition

Given our present-day sophisticated understanding of the formation and handing-down of Scripture, the 'traditioning-process' is readily seen as the key to the entire revelational-process. It is certainly the most practical one in the life of the Church, for it is the chief medium of bringing the gospel to the people. Jewel's unique contribution was to single out the main reasoning-process ('demonstration by consensus') within this traditioning-process. This spelling-out of the inner workings of revelation, common sense as it may seem, was and is a great need. The fact that the Holy Spirit besides the Scriptures also uses human reason as his witness and instrument (without which there would be no preaching, no theology, and no understanding of Scripture) is one of the key presuppositions for all Christian theology. Even radical Puritanism, which was very hard on reason's role, made liberal use of it in spinning-out their Calvinistic systems.

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[63] Ibid., pp. 184-90.

Rationalism: Humanistic and Christian

There is a difference in the Cranmer-Jewel use of reason and that of later 'rationalism.' Jewel espoused what has been called Christian-rationalism. He was influenced by his friend Richard Hooker who was far more the humanistic-rationalist. Hooker's rationalism can be described as 'a collective reason' both in time and in place. "The general and perpetual voice of men," he wrote, "is as the sentence of God himself."[64] By the 'general and perpetual voice of men' Hooker meant both the past Christian teaching and the present consensus of reasonable men. Infallibility however he attributed to neither. Nor did they bear any intrinsic claim to authority. The only test was the reasonableness of their demonstration and the recognition of its correctness by reasonable men. We see already Hooker's groping. Reason, even group-reason, can't stand alone as the way to God. Yet Hooker hesitates to turn to the Spirit for direct inspiration of reason fearing that this will fall into 'private revelation' or 'subjective spiritualism.' He searches for an objective testimony beyond that of Scripture, for an objective 'interpretation.' Rejecting the authoritarian interpretation of Rome his only recourse is to the consensus of learned and elite, the 'church fathers.' But even they had no final or infallible authority. Their only value was toward the further understanding of God's Word. This brings us again back to Scripture still without the objective-interpretative authority for which our search began.

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[64] *Ibid.*, p. 138, citing Hooker, *Works*, I, viii, 3.

Southgate criticizes Hooker's theology of authority as incomplete. "Where reason is the test, finality and absolute completeness can never exist," Southgate notes, "men being men and capable of error. Hooker was well aware of this. He did not expect to find 'proof infallible.' Thus he . . . returned to a position comparable to that of the early humanists. His was a demand that truth be sought, not a claim that truth had been found: it was a _faith in the method_."[65] For Hooker 'faith' was not an easy acceptance of certainty but rather a belief in reason's capacity to strive for and eventually understand God's will. Hooker was a true humanist.

Jewel accepted the traditional Christian view that man was helpless without the aid of divine grace, and we have called him a Christian rationalist. But even he, because of a fear of subjectivism, was ambivalent with regard to integrating the Spirit into his theology of authority. As far as strictly interpretative-authority is concerned he would have to be classified with Hooker, a humanistic rationalist. Southgate summarizes Jewel's position as follows:

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[65] _Ibid._, pp. 138-39, citing Hooker, _Works_, II, vii,5.

> He believed that if all the evidence concerning a problem were clearly set forth . . ., the normally intelligent man would be able to judge and to choose the right.
>
> Jewel's insistence upon reasonable persuasion and a rational approach to authority extended to all of his interpretative authorities. He would not follow blindly even the fathers of the Church, . . . but only as they were able to persuade their readers to the rightness of their teachings. To support this view he cited the fathers themselves. They expected to be accepted only in so far as they were able to convince their hearers of the reasonableness of their interpretations.
>
> Logically if men are to be free to judge they must have freedom to examine the evidence, to seek the truth where it is to be found. . . .[66]

This leaves us where we began with 'man's freedom to search for truth' but with no certain authoritative way or criterion for his finding it. Jewel and Hooker are equally well boxed-in.

Jewel's No-Exit

"A final and basic question remains," concludes Southgate, "who is to interpret the law of God, who is to have the responsibility for the formulation of doctrine?"[67] Jewel was unable to answer. He was caught at an impasse--on the one side by the immediate exigencies of Elizabethan Erastianism; on the other by his anti-Rome polemics. His answer had to be 'not to answer.' A last path could have been tried, a type of conciliarism. Jewel admitted to its potentiality but locked this exit as well. A council of learned men could go far towards settling many problems. But all this was too closely tied-in with the papacy for Jewel who saw Church Councils " . . . acting always at the behest of an authority other than their own."[68] In the final outcome Jewel's search for an interpretative authority seems to lead him back to the very document he attempts to interpret. Southgate writes:

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[66] Ibid., pp. 139-42, citing Jewel's Defence, Works III, 227.

[67] Ibid., p. 212.

> Jewel turned to the councils of the first six hundred years . . . Only these, and especially the ecumenical councils, were worthy in his eyes of consideration as valid authority. They alone represented the true tradition of the early Church. Since they were more nearly contemporaneous with the age of the apostles, with the great period of divine revelation, they were more likely to have understood the meaning of that revelation . . . Jewel's denial that the grace which alone can insure a complete and absolute understanding of the original revelation had been given to any institution in perpetuity, destroyed the element of timelessness and forced him always to move closer to the apostolic age for authority.[69]

Conclusions on Jewel

In his search into the authority problem Jewel cut himself off from two key witnessess--the Church and the dynamic presence of the Spirit in the contemporaneous Church. He also shunned Biblic*ism*. Thus by a process of elimination he was forced to turn to the power of human reason and "demonstrability." This choice in itself was not wrong. It was and is a needed *aspect* to the fuller understanding of the revelation-authority problem. But to semi-absolutize "reason" to the *exclusion of* Church and present-day charisms of the Holy Spirit was to leave Jewel with an *essentially incomplete* answer to the problem.

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[68] Ibid., p. 130, Jewel wrote (Epistle to Scipio, Works,IV, 1122): "As for our parts, we do not fear and fly, but desire and wish for a council, so that it be free, honest, and Christian; so that men meet as the apostles did; so that abbots and bishops be freed from the constraint of that oath by which they are now bound to the popes; so that the whole consipiracy be dissolved; so that the men of our part may be temperately and freely heard, and not condemmed without being heard; so that one man may not have the power to overthrow and repeal whatsoever is done."

[69] Ibid., pp. 132-33.

There is one invaluable fruit from Jewel's 'episcopal' approach. It was firm in warding off all biblicism--the inherent disease of Puritan radicalism as we will soon see. It was prematurely and unwittingly in harmony with the much later tenets of Biblical criticism. Besides biblical scholarship the emphasis on human reason-searching-out-the-truth lends itself above all to the theory of doctrinal-evolution and growth in understanding of faith. Hooker and Jewel are given credit for this contribution by Southgate:

> . . . Hooker stated specifically that all the essentials of salvation were *not* to be found *contained* in the Scriptures in the sense that they "do import setting down in plain terms." They are rather *comprehended* "in such sort that *by reason* we may from thence conclude all things which are necessary." . . .
>
> In place of mere words, Jewel stressed their "sense and meaning" . . . The Word of God, though it is *in the* words, must not be identified with *the* words. In Jewel's thought it is equated with the sense and meaning of the Scriptures, with the substance of the Scriptures. "God's word written in paper is a creature corruptible, and shall consume and perish, as other corruptible creatures do:'but

> the word of God' which we speak of 'endureth forever.'"[70]

The circle has therefore come full round to the interpretative aspect of the authority problem. It is at this point that all aspects of the revelational-traditioning process must meet and be integrated. In the Church and under the Spirit reason-enlightened-by-faith must always interpret the older-interpretations of Scripture and formulate a new confession. It is well to keep all these aspects in mind as we turn to the Puritan approach. One or another of them eclipses itself from time to time--as will be the case at Westminster, but the need for balance keeps reasserting itself. Bible, Church and Reason under one Spirit are so uniquely related that without all of them each of them would be distorted.

THE PURITAN DOCTRINE ON AUTHORITY

Introduction

The Puritan approach to the authority problem should be studied in the light of our general history of doctrine and polity. Involved in the history was a spectrum whose extremes were the eras of radical Puritanism and radical anti-Puritanism (Episcopalianism). At the time of Westminster radical Presbyterianism (the moderate wing of Puritanism) was in ascendency. Concerning the authority problem the struggle soon polarized between the traditionalistic-rationalistic Episcopal approach and the simplifying-reform approach of the Calvinist Puritans. It will be significant for our study of American Presbyterianism that from late English Puritanism two rival schools of Scriptural authority arose. One followed hyper-orthodox scholasticism into biblicism (the _tendency_ of Westminster) while the other reacted to this first group and evolved into Methodism (the American counterpart was to be found in the 'Great Awakening'). It is also significant that once 'religious freedom' from authoritarianism began to be won, energies were turned to the problem of doctrinal growth. As the 'fundamental problem' of Christian theology the problem which came quickly to the forefront was that on authority. "Perhaps the most important lessons that can be learned from . . . the development of Protestant theology," writes Robert Johnson, "are that the question of theological authority is one that must be answered with a view to the whole, and that any answer that is not consistent with the necessary orientation and the essential content of Christian theology is _ipso jure_ inacceptable."[71]

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[70] *Ibid.*, pp. 151-55, citing Hooker, *Works*, I, 14, 2 and Jewel, *Defence, Works*, III, 434.

The Scriptural Authority Controversy

From what we have seen of the Episcopal approach to the interpretative-authority problem we might epitomize its spirit as that of 'Christian-historical-rationalism.' The Episcopal theologians shied away from any appeal either to the Spirit or to the contemporary Church for authority. Scriptural authority was acknowledged but not in virtue of Scripture's own clairvoyance. It needed an objective-interpretative authority for which 'demonstration from consensus' was an invariable concomitant. Such a spirit was far from the Puritan approach. "The question," writes Schaff, "was chiefly whether the Scriptures as interpreted by private judgment, or the Scriptures as interpreted by the fathers of the primitive Church, should be the rule of faith and discipline."[72] Thomas Cartwright and Walter Travers represented the Puritan answer in a debate with Archbishop Whitgift and Richard Hooker. "The Puritans," notes Schaff, "advocated Scriptural Christianity versus historical Christianity; Hooker historical Christianity as consistent with Scriptural Christianity."[73] Developing the point further Briggs adds that the Puritans "emphasized preaching rather than the sacraments and public prayer."[74] Citing William Bradshaw's classical English Puritanism (1604) he tells us:

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[71] Johnson, _op. cit._, p. 12.

> "They (the Puritans) hold that the highest and supreme office of the pastor is to preach the gospel. The pastor or minister of the Word is not to teach any doctrine unto the church, grounded upon his own

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[72] Schaff, I, 706.

[73] Ibid. (italics ours).

[74] Briggs, Hist., p. 38.

> judgment . . . but only that which he is able to demonstrate and prove evidently, and apparently by the Word of God soundly interpreted."[75]

"The Prelates of the Anglo-Roman cast," concludes Briggs, "put forth every effort to suppress it, but there were always pious Puritan Prelates to encourage it."[76]

Both sides hardened their positions. In time some overstated and exaggerated them. It is important to observe however that there was a common beginning. Both sides were basically Calvinistic and more basically Augustinian. Both were against 'private interpretation.' Both opposed Rome's ecclesiastical-interpretation and had to explain their positions in the face of it. The differences however soon overcame the similarities. The Puritans were closer to the theological 'bias' of Calvin: that faith is ultimately dependent on the Spirit. They also shared his negative bias against human-reason rooted in his Augustinian-Pauline view of man's fallen state. The episcopal-rationalism seemed to build upon a more optimistic view (at least less pessimistic) of man's reasoning powers. The Puritan theology would win the day at Westminster.

Calvinistic Preludes to Westminster

The general description of Westminster's doctrines applies now to the doctrine of authority. It should be re-called that Westminster was a great synthesizing-compromising effort. Thus on the question of Scripture and its authority no other Reformed Confession went into the detail that Westminster did. Our task then is to trace the unfootnoted origins of Westminster--a task for comparative symbolics. A peculiarly valuable approach is to study the elements of other Reformed Confessions which Westminster has omitted.

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[75] Cf. ibid., footnote.

[76] Ibid.

Dr. Dowey has given us the best comparative study. Its general thesis likens Westminster to an expanded version of the *Second Helvetic Confession*. "A tremendous difference exists however," Dowey notes, "in that Westminster literature does *not* contain material comparable to . . . the Second Helvetic on preaching and the illumination of faith."[77] Dowey also notes that the French and Belgic Confessions (the two closest to Calvin) were lacking in this regard. "The lack," he notes, "seems to increase in proportion to the distance from Calvin. Or is it in proportion to the increasingly polemic stance against Tridentine Catholicism and Lutheranism?"[78] "By the time of Westminster," Dowey adds summarily and critically, "the topic of faith was practically unnecessary. The Westminster doctrine of Scripture seems . . . to 'solve' completely the epistemological problem of faith."[79] Dowey's comment echoes again his interpretation of Calvin. The point he stressed was that Calvin situated the authority problem ultimately within the problem of faith. As such it cannot be totally 'objectivized' whether by Church authority, or by Scripture, or by patristic-consensus. Faith is an interpersonal experience grounded-in the divine authority and anything less is not faith. It would be vacuous for theology to explain the authoritative-aspect of faith by some totally reasonable process. Faith's authority is primarily a mystery. It is believed and not comprehended. It is God himself. All Christians profess this mystery-aspect but from time to time theories have verged on explaining-away the mystery when they enthrone one or the other of the mediative authorities in the place of the ultimate divine authority. This being Dowey's general thesis we turn now to his comparative-symbolics. He compares Westminster with three Reformed Confessions: the Scots, the Heidelberg, and the Second Helvetic.

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[77] Dowey, *art. cit.* (Seminar paper), p. 5.

[78] *Ibid.*

[79] *Ibid.*

Composed in four days by Knox and his companions after their Geneva exile with Calvin the Scots Confession of 1560 is very close to Calvin's own thought and expression. In fact Dowey praises it more than Calvin's own French (Gallic) Confession. "The Scottish Confession," he says, "would seem to represent even better than the French, the side of Reformation teaching, in which faith rather than Biblical authority is at the center of the Church's theological activity."[80] (Dowey does qualify the last statement: "although, of course, Biblical authority is strongly affirmed."[81]) Calvin's French Confession Dowey points out has the same ambivalence that his Institutes have shown.[82]

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[80] Ibid., p. 11.

The Heidelberg Confession (1563), the catechetical composition of Ursinus and Olevianus, is compared to the Scots Confession by Dowey: "It shows a remarkable freshness, both of style and structure. Like the Scottish Confession, the Heidelberg reflects certain Reformation emphases lost in the more direct lineage of Westminster . . ."[83] Schaff corroborates Dowey's opinion: "The Calvinistic system is herein set forth with wise moderation, and without its sharp angular points."[84] Concerning Heidelberg's specific treatment of biblical authority Dowey likens it to the Lutheran symbols in its sparsity. An account of the living-redeeming faith takes precedence over biblical authority. He cites Heidelberg's Question XXI as an epitome of the Confession's epistemology of faith:

> "What is true faith?
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> It is not only a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word, but also a hearty trust which the Holy

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[81] Ibid. Dowey adds (ibid.): "Arts. xix and xx, on Scriptural authority repeat the familiar principle that God himself speaking in Scripture is the sole source and norm of faith."

[82] See ibid., p. 9.

[83] Ibid., p. 12.

[84] Schaff, I, 540.

> Ghost works in me by the Gospel that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely by grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits."[85]

Dowey concludes by holding up the 'openness' of the Scots and Heidelberg Confessions in opposition to Westminster's 'centripetal character,' whereby biblical-authority is presented as guiding all else. "The Westminster literature," Dowey says, "seems to have achieved a systematic refinement on the base of a wrongly oriented view of Biblical authority that precludes further development."[86] "If the Westminster Assembly were allowed to function as a kind of Protestant Council of Trent,--the producer of irreformable dogma," Dowey closes, "much of the significance of the Reformation would be lost."[87] He urges us to return to the spirit of the older Reformed Confessions and then face afresh what _it_ means for our own day.

The _Second Helvetic_ Confession consists of a long summary of Bullinger's personal beliefs. It is the last and best of the Zwinglian family. Bullinger was Zwingli's successor at Zurich and he took the best from his Master who had already taken the best from Luther and harmonized it with the best Reformed thought. "Bullinger was himself a kind of Reformation consensus," writes Dowey, "bridging the generations from Luther and Zwingli to Calvin and after, . . . and bridging both the English Channel and the boundaries of Poland and Hungary."[88] Schaff places Bullinger's influence as "inferior only to that of Calvin."[89] He was in correspondence with the leading Reformers in England[90] who reported to him about the progress of the English Reform.

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[86] _Ibid_.

[87] _Ibid_., p. 2.

The first two chapters of the _Second Helvetic_, on Scripture and on its Interpretation, are relevant to our inquiry. They pattern themselves on the _First Helvetic_ Confession (1536) in which Bullinger also had part.[91] Since this Confession was composed before Calvin reached the height of his influence it has a good bit of Lutheran influence. _Second Helvetic_ maintained the Lutheran influence in its chapters on faith and justification but added the Reformed elements about the inspired canon. Dowey mentions however that the integration of the formal and material principles was virtually present,[92] and that, compared with _First Helvetic_, there was "an expansion and change of emphasis . . . in that revelation _in the believer_ plays a larger role alongside the doctrine of an original inspiration."[93] The Spirit's present illumination of the believer is emphasized; and Luther's 'law _versus_ gospel' distinction is reflected in that historical-writing is contrasted with preaching (xiii, 3 and 4). In fact _Second Helvetic_ surpasses the

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[88] _Ibid_., p. 6.

[89] Schaff, I, 390.

[90] See _ibid_.

[91] See Dowey, _art. cit_., p. 6.

[92] See _ibid_., pp. 4-5.

[93] _Ibid_., p. 7.

Lutheran symbols in giving primacy to the viva voce communication. "The same preaching of the Gospel," Dowey comments, "is by the Apostle termed Spirit and 'the ministry of the Spirit' (II Cor. 3:7): because it lives and works through faith, in the ears, yea, in the hearts of believers by illumination of the Holy Spirit."[94] With Westminster these insights were to go into eclipse. Due largely to the influence of Dowey[95] they have been restored in the 1967 Confession. By

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[94] See ibid., pp. 7-8. Much the same appraisal is given by Professor Schaff (I, 395): " . . . [The Second Helvetic] is in substance a restatement of the First Helvetic Confession but with great improvements in matter and form. . . . As in former Confessions, so also in this, Bullinger distinctly recognizes, in the spirit of Christian liberty and progress, the constant growth in the knowledge of the Word of God and the constant right of improvement in symbolical statements of the Christian faith."

[95] See ibid., pp. 8-9. In unpublished class notes commenting on the Second Helvetic Confession, Dowey concludes with a more optimistic qualifying note about chapter 2 (p. 10): "Scripture thus understood is said to be sufficient and authoritative for faith and life, government and reformation of the church.

" . . . Scripture, accordingly, is the basic element in the theological content of the confession. All the more is it important that the Bible is not presented as primarily an ancient deposit of faith, but as instrumental to the present work of the Spirit in the Church. That God still speaks to us through the Scriptures . . . is the most important methodological statement in the document. . . . It does disclose at a single stroke the source, criterion, and goal [scopus] for expounding the Word of God in the Church." And in this sense Dowey stated earlier that (ibid.): "it is the Word interpreted . . . that is effective in the church . . ." Interpretation, then, becomes a dynamic "must"--for Scripture becomes living instrument (means) and not an objectified and absolute end. These remarks should be correlated with the remarks from the survey section on Dowey (see infra chaps. 6 and 8).

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innuendo a strong case has been built up against Westminster's non-treatment of (or inadequate treatment of) the epistemology of faith. It must be remembered however that much of this was determined by its compromise-task. The documents must be taken in this context. The process of evolution does not follow a straight line.

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION ON AUTHORITY

Introduction

The overall context of Westminster was that of 'baroque England' about which Dowey tells us: "It was the time of 'confessional absolutism' when each of the fragmented communions of Christendom had to compress into a century or so the laborious process of creating a Catholic orthodoxy."[96] Hendry's description describes the baroque-genré even more strongly. "The authors of the Confession," he says, "thought it was incumbent upon them to deliver categorical answers to all questions that could be raised concerning the faith. Only once do they hint at mystery (III, 8); for the rest they know all the answers and can explain everything."[97] For all the hindsight criticism however the main body of commentators recognize the merits of

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[96] Ibid., p. 14.

[97] George S. Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 14.

Westminster. "The Westminster Confession was the greatest achievement of its kind in the century" Dowey writes. "The learning and insight of the men assembled make the Assembly one of the most impressive of the modern church."[98] Even in his post-Presbyterian stage Briggs wrote his praise:"The Westminster Confession was the fruit of the second Reformation in Great Britain, and as such, full of life and vigor and thereby less scholastic than Concord and Dort."[99]

Westminster's General Scriptural-Authority

Reflective of the Reform reaction to Rome's Counter-Reformation, Westminster "shows a heavy preoccupation with presenting the Bible and the principles of biblical interpretation in terms of strong, objective authority."[100] "The first chapter in which Biblical authority is presented as a basic systematic postulate for the chapters that follow," notes Dowey, "is certainly the culmination of a Reformed tendency to shift the problem of the cognitive aspect of faith to that of biblical authority, more especially to the doctrine of inspiration."[101] Schaff's position one hundred years before Dowey's was not quite as critical. He admitted that Westminster stood on the 'Bible platform' but claimed that it did so without depreciating the aid of human learning (patristic, scholastic, or modern). Protestantism for Schaff had to sink or swim with this principle (the polemical element was still evident in his time). "The Confession," he wrote, "rests the authority of the Bible on its own intrinsic excellence and the internal testimony of the Spirit rather than the external testimony of the Church, however valuable this is as a continuous witness."[102] At least concerning the labor put into and the considered-importance of this first chapter we have no unfavorable testimony. Mitchell, the earliest historian of Westminster, reports: "If any chapter was carefully framed, it was this . . . It formed the subject of repeated and earnest debate in the House of Commons as well as in the Assemble."[103] "The authority of the Scripture was the key to all the deliberations of the Assembly "[104] was the appraisal of Dr. T. C. Pears on Westminster's three-hundredth anniversary. At the Westminster Assembly itself each member was required to take the following vow: "that in this Assembly I will maintain nothing in doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God, nor in discipline, but what may make most for God's glory and the peace of this Church."[105] Thus we have the context, and now we turn to the analysis of Westminster's famous first chapter.

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[98] Dowey, art. cit., p. 14.

[99] C. A. Briggs, Church Unity: Studies of its Most Important Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 308.

[100] Dowey, loc. cit.

[101] Ibid.

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[102] Schaff, I, 766.

[103] Mitchell, Minutes of the West. Assembly, xlix.

[104] T. C. Pears, Jr., "Some of the Abiding Values of the Work of the Westminster Assembly in the American Tradition," The Westminster Assembly, Its History, Formularies, and Abiding Values (Three papers for tercentenary; Philadelphia: Dept. of Hist. of the Office of the General Assembly. ... , 1943), p. 20.

On Scripture as Revelation (I,1)

Reflecting on the first paragraph[106] of Westminster's chapter on Scripture Hendry criticizes its conception of revelation as being too narrow. According to Hendry revelation is not merely verbal in form but primarily 'eventful.' God's words are only the speaking-side of his actions. Most of all Hendry criticizes Westminster for never once mentioning that the heart of revelation is Jesus Christ.[107] From our own viewpoint Hendry's most important comment on I,1 concerns the role played by the church. He writes: "The knowledge of God which is given in revelation is given within a relationship, which, in fact, it constitutes. It is not given to all and sundry, but 'unto his church'"[108] Insight number three from Hendry focuses on the interpersonal aspect of revelation. "Knowledge of God," he says, "is given only to those whom he sets in a personal relation to himself."[109] This aspect is further developed in Chapter VII (On God's Covenant with Man). "The pre-Reformation church tendency for many centuries," Hendry comments, "had been to construe the relations and dealings between God and men in impersonal, or sub-personal, categories, such as substance. It was the realization that such categories are inadequate which led to the revival of interest in the idea of the covenant."[110] Hendry's last comment on I,1 is important for the 1967 Confession.

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[105] Ibid.

[106] Westminster Confession, I, 1 reads: "Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God as to leave men inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary, those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased." [Book of Confessions , p. 125].

[107] See Hendry, op. cit., p. 24.

> . . . The Confession makes it clear that _the Bible_ is _not_ simply _identical with the revelation of God_; there is a distinction between them; the revelation was given first, the Bible came afterwards--indeed, it was because of 'those former ways of God revealing his will, being now ceased' that the revelation was committed to writing. Although 'the former ways' of revelation have ceased, revelation is continued in another way. It is committed to the written record in such a way that the written record can convey it to those who use it, and bind them into the same relation to God . . . The Bible is 'most necessary' as our only means of access to it; and for this reason it can be called 'the word of God written' . . .[111]

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[108] _Ibid_., p. 25.

[109] _Ibid_., p. 26.

[110] _Ibid_., p. 86, referring to Calvin's _Institutes_, II, 9-11.

[111] _Ibid_. p. 26.

In commenting on Hendry's commentary we choose one point. It concerns the 'gospel-content' of the Bible, the 'Lutheran insight.' "The Bible is the word of God in the sense that its essential contents are the word of God," Briggs once wrote, "but not in the sense that every word, sentence and clause is the word of God . . ."[112] Hendry agrees with Briggs that it is the 'meaning of the gospel' that is all important and that the 'book' is just a means. But this leads to a necessary consequence: 'meaning' demands 'interpretation,' and interpretation demands the Church. Again we borrow from Briggs: "It is clear to me that the Bible needs the Church and the reason ere it can exert its full power upon the life of men."[113] This reciprocity of media used by the Spirit in bringing God's revelation to men again demands our hearing. Bible, Church, and Reason, all three must be bound together in one complex "theological norm" always under the Spirit. Westminster struggled for the norm but as we will now see it seems to have fallen short.

The Authority of Scripture in Westminster (I, 4-10)

Westminster's treatment of Scriptural authority (4-5, 10), its principle of interpretation (9 and 7), and its content of

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[112] Briggs, General Intro. to the Study of Holy Scripture (New York: Scribner's, 1899), pp. 634-36, 640.

[113] Briggs, The Authority of Scripture, An Inaugural Address (New York: 1891), p. 95.

Scripture are intimately connected. First we read them and then discuss their epistemology of faith. We have gathered pertinent paragraphs of the Chapter together:

> [Authority, 4-5, 10]
>
> 4. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.
>
> 5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture . . . ; yet, not withstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.
>
> 10. The Supreme Judge, by whom all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.
>
> [Interpretation, 9 and 7]
>
> 9. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.
>
> 7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain . . ., nor alike clear unto all; yet these things . . . necessary for salvation, are so clearly propounded . . . that not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.
>
> [Content, 6]
>
> 6. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation,

> faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit . . . to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word . . .[114]

For a well balanced epistemology of faith and authoritative theological-norm we have seen that three reciprocally interrelated criteria are necessary, all under the action of the Spirit. From the Westminster Confession itself and from various commentaries on it we will follow the struggle to integrate these criteria.

It is most clear that Westminster stressed the Scriptural criterion and in this followed Calvin himself. "The authority of God Himself speaking through the Holy Spirit by and with the Word to the heart," comments Briggs, "determines that the writings are infallible as the inspired word of God."[115] The criterion then is not the Word alone but, as Calvin had taught, it is the Word and the Spirit in reciprocal inter-relationship. To show that this was the intention of Westminster Briggs cites Charles Herle, Westminster's Prolocutor. "We believe unto salvation, not the Word barely, because it witnesses to itself," Herle explains, "but because the Spirit speaking in it to our consciences witnesses to them that it is the Word indeed."[116] Thus we have the first criterion, the Bible. What about the second, the episcopal-criterion of reason?

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[114] The Proposed Book of Confessions of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1966),pp. 126-27.

[115] Briggs, Whither? A Theological Question for the Times (New York: Scribner, 1880), p. 75.

Concerning reason's role the father of 'the Princeton theology,' Archibald Alexander, argues for its place. "But that every sincere Christian should be able, in all cases, by this internal light," Alexander says, "to distinguish between canonical books, is surely no safe or reasonable opinion. It is certain that the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary; but to make this the only criterion is certainly liable to strong objections."[117] Briggs who elsewhere has championed a place for reason inconsistently criticizes Alexander (possibly because of his own polemical situation at the time). He accused Alexander of abandoning the principles of Luther, Calvin, and the Reformed Confessions by trying to find faith in the sand of human tradition. "It is true that the Anglican Reformation,"

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[116] Ibid., p. 76, citing Herle's Detur Sapenti (London, 1655).

[117] Ibid., p. 77, citing A. Alexander's Canon of the Old and New Testaments, pp. 114-16. Briggs also cites C. Hodge, Systematic Theol., I, 152-53.

Briggs argues, "stopped at this half-way house. But the Westminster divines did not. It is entirely inconsistent with the Puritan appeal to the _Scriptures alone_."[118] It is more inconsistent of Briggs (see corpus to n. 113).

Concerning the role of the Church in Westminster Hendry will be our expert. At first he seems to rule out all ecclesial authority. "The Confession rejects _any attempt_ to establish the authority of Scripture on extrinisc grounds " Hendry says. "Here it is primarily opposing the argument used by some Roman Catholics in the controversies of the Reformation, that the authority of Scripture was conferred on it by the Church."[119] This involves us in the question of private _versus_ communal interpretation and in the problem of harmonizing individual and public testimony to faith. Hendry tells us that an intelligent use of Scripture depends on our _distinguishing_ its content. He claims that Westminster admits of cases calling for 'authoritative-interpretative guidance.' "But the Confession is careful," he adds, "to distinguish between the occasional necessity of employing logical inference and the view that the message is so incompletely delivered that it requires supplementing, either by additional revelations, or by extra-canonical traditions."[120]

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[118] _Ibid_., p. 79.

[119] Hendry, _op. cit_., p. 30.

[120] _Ibid_., p. 35.

Hendry next explains Westminster's principle of interpretation (I, 9), that Scripture is its own interpreter. He explains that: "Positively . . . the meaning of any particular passage . . . must be sought in the light of the general meaning of Scripture as a whole."[121] To avoid 'subjectivism' or the accusation of a 'vicious circle' Hendry says that Westminster has recourse, as Calvin did, to the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Does the Church then have no role in the 'developmental-interpretative' process? For Westminster's answer we must go to her theology on the church, on the councils, and on decrees etc.

According to Westminster the role of the Church consists in "the exercise of certain functions: 'the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God' . . ."[122] In performing these functions the Church recognizes that "it cannot make the word and the sacraments effect the purpose for which they were given. Only he who gave them can do that (I, 5), and the ministry is his instrument."[123] One might conclude that there is at least a 'functional authority' attributed to the Church according to Westminster's theology, but the precise functions and the precise authority, especially concerning 'teaching,' were not spelled out. Most probably, as Dowey implied earlier, the anti-Trent and anti-Lutheran polemics played an inhibiting role in this matter.

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid., p. 215.

[123] Ibid., p. 216.

Hendry offers some interesting leads and signposts for future development in his comments on Chapter XXX (Of Church Censures) and Chapter XXXI (Of Synods and Councils). Concerning Chapter XXX Hendry says: "The subject of this chapter is much broader than the title suggests; it is the authority and functions of church government as a whole."[124] Commenting on XXX, 2 Hendry writes: "The principle function . . . is that of operating the keys of the kingdom. Mt. 23:13 and Luke 11:52 makes it clear that the figure . . . was used to open not the gates of heaven, but the gates of knowledge."[125] This responsibility includes for Hendry 'the ministry of the gospel' and the Christian nurture of those who have received the gospel. This positive meaning of 'discipline' Hendry remarks is being lost. It gives us the key insight to all authority. It is power, but power employed "in service."

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[124] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 235, *Westminster Confession*, XXX, 2: "To these officers the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that Kingdom against the impenitent, both by the word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require." [*Book of Confessions*, p. 150].

Concerning Chapter XXXI (On Church Councils) Hendry says: "The Confession does not mean that these are destitute of authority altogether. But whatever authority they possess, it is subordinate to the authority of Scripture and may not be elevated above it."[126] The whole question on the authority of Confessions "may be considered to fall into this category (See XXXIII, 3)."[127] Commenting on XXXI, 2[128] Hendry gives his own explanation of the function and authority of councils:

> The function of synods and councils concern the determination of questions of faith and ethics and the ordering of worship and government . . . with which the local congregation is clearly incompetent to deal.
>
> Synods and councils have also to serve as courts of appeal from the decisions of inferior (congregational) courts. And while their own decisions cannot overrule the word of God, they do overrule the decisions of inferior courts.[129]

Conciliar decisions then do have authority, but as far as the crucial issue for an authoritative-teaching-interpreting authority in the living church Westminster (XXXI, 3) closes off absolutely any possibility for an ongoing infallibility in Christ's living Church. There is little need to stress that this issue is a most relevant area for ecumenical research.

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[126] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[127] *Ibid.*

[128] *Westminster Confession*, XXXI, 2: "It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially, to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience: to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same: which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his Word." [*Book of Confessions*, p. 150]

[129] Hendry, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

Some Criticisms of Westminster

Briggs redeems his inconsistency-lapse by asking a question relative to the 'insufficiency of Scripture.' Is Sacred Scripture the only infallible standard of orthodoxy? He answers his own question: "The Sacred Scriptures are not the only source of Christian theology. The New Testament does not give us the entire instruction of Jesus Christ . . . The Bible does not decide all questions of doctrine . . . ."[130] Whenever we have a Scripture that must be constantly interpreted, and whenever we have doctrine that truly develops, we must employ the use of antecedent development or tradition. But all this points to the need for the Spirit to guide not only the Scripture but also the whole Church in her interpretation of Scripture and to do so with some kind of authoritative em-power-ment.

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[130] Briggs, Whither, pp. 9-11.

PART II. AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM

BEGINNINGS UNTIL 1936

CHAPTER THREE

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM: ITS TURNING POINT

INTRODUCTION

The General Scene

With the American scene we can begin where our concluding remarks to the European origins left off. In America Presbyterianism would struggle and win the freedom to fully evolve. From its official foundation--which we will set with the 1729 Adopting Act--up until the adoption of the 1967 Confession, there was a fairly homogeneous development and continuation of those struggles we have seen in her early origins. This would be especially so in the dual areas of doctrine and polity and their juncture-point, the authority problem.

Two opposing forces were involved, which can be described by an adaptation of F. J. Leenhardt's comparison of Protestantism and Catholicism. "Protestantism through Paul," Leenhardt writes, "refers back to Abraham, and Catholicism through Peter to Moses . . ."[1] His comparison of 'the two faiths' we will adapt as 'two forces' within faith.

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[1] F. J. Leenhardt, Two Biblical Faiths: Protestant and Catholic (Tr. by Harold Knight; Phila.: Westminster, 1964), p. 25.

"The faith of Abraham is that proper to first beginnings and to ever fresh beginnings;" Leenhardt continues, "the faith of Moses is concerned, above all, for continuity. The former is open to the future and richly pregnant with potentialities which the latter realizes, stabilizes and builds into a coherent whole."[2] Leenhardt's characterization no longer holds, we feel, as a clear demarcation between Protestantism and Catholicism, but may aptly be applied to two opposing forces operating within and among all Christian churches. These forces were most evident in the origins of American Presbyterianism, and paradoxically (for a Reformed Church) it would be the Mosaic principle that would for a long time dominate. But from time to time there were balancing moments from the side of the Abrahamic force. Leenhardt's own conclusion, that each force was dependent on the other and that excessive emphasis for too long on either one produced a distorted Christianity, applies to Protestant and Catholic churches. It has special relevance to the historical development of American Presbyterianism which we now study.

In terms of our focal problem of authority a look at our own contemporary scene will help us to set the perspective for the past struggle. The growth in the expressed Catholic doctrine on freedom helps us to appreciate the Presbyterian struggle a quarter of a century prior to Vatican II. No one will ever be able to document how important the Protestant struggle has been to Catholicism. Thus, a Catholic theologian made the following comment on Vatican II's _Declaration on Religious Freedom_:

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[2] Ibid., p. 105.

> It is a document of crucial importance for the life of the Church in the present age. The sterile opposition of the minority prevented the Council from reaching out to greater depths of Christian theology in elaborating a statement that would have wider implications for human freedom in general, including freedom within the Church. _The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World_ exhibits a greater sense of history and development. Many of the paragraphs of this Constitution, if properly assimilated, will affect the Catholic understanding of freedom within the ecclesiastical institution. The opening sentences of the _Declaration on Religious Freedom_ reflect this historical outlook. These sentences relate the Declaration to Vatican Council II as a whole and to the entire movement of renewal in the Church: "Contemporary man is becoming more deeply conscious of the dignity of the human person. There is an increase of those who demand that in his actions man should act on his own judgment, that he _should enjoy_ and make use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty."[3]

As a follow up to Vatican II the first Plenary Assembly of the Dutch Pastoral Council (January 1967)--laymen, priests, and bishops along with Cardinal Alfrink--discussed the topic of freedom and authority in the Church. Five American theological observers summarized the Assembly's "report." Two kinds of authority were distinguished.[4] They were based on two different kinds of community--the functional community united to achieve practical goals and the community of persons drawn together to live a common ideal. The former was hierarchically structured according to its goals. Its authority depended on the expertness of those assigned to the task. But in the latter there was to be no 'above' or 'below' and its authority was based on a person's power to inspire or witness to an ideal. The report said that the Church must be both functional and personal community at once. But it was to be first and foremost a community of believers, and so of persons. For modern man a hierarchical structure which was "next to, outside or above" the community was unacceptable and unreconcilable with the dignity of the human person and the gospel. Ministers have a call to proclaim and serve. They in turn issue a call inviting conviction, not a command trying to force it. This must be the starting point for any authority in the Church.

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[3] Gregory Baum, "Declaration on Religious Freedom--Development of Its Doctrinal Basis," _The Ecumenist_ 4 (September-October 1966), p. 126.

These two examples enable us to see Leenhardt's Abrahamic-Mosaic duality in contemporary terms, but always with the same conclusion: both forces of the duality are needed. And so our present paradox of finding Roman Catholic in the role of protest-against and Protestant in search-for Mosaic authority should not surprise us, but confirm us in our hopes that further development in our mutual doctrines on authority promises further convergence.

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[4] Ignatius van Rijn, "A Dutch View of Authority," America 117 (March 23, 1968), pp. 372-73.

An Outline of American Presbyterianism

With the arrival in the new continent the battle for religious-freedom from the State was over and the struggle would now turn to freedom within the church and to Church authority itself. The background to this struggle, we recall, had a direct precedent in the Church of England with the near ascendency to power of the radical Presbyterians, followed in quick order by the radical Cromwellian-Separatists and soon after by the radical monarchical Episcopalians--with all the accompanying persecutions and counter-persecutions. Ecclesiological forces came under the sway of psychological-sociological forces, in many ways comparable in their excesses to nationalistic forces. And as in the analogous national scenes it would take a new broadening milieu along with the necessary time-interval to bring about the 'victory of moderation.'

The struggle in America caused much psychological bloodshed. There would be two major schisms (and many minor ones) as the Abrahamic forces (the so-called New Side and New School adherents) wrestled with the Mosaic (Old Side and Old School). The interrelationship of polity-and-doctrine would continue to comprise the content arena as the tension between the forces for doctrinal freedom and those for church authority began to express itself.

In her Colonial days the struggle would take place between the forces of the so-called 'Great Awakening' (largely centering in the New England Congregationalists) and the Scots-Irish emigrants of radical, covenanting, high-church, authoritarian polity. The specific issue would be the manner of "subscription" to the Westminster Confession. In our opinion this issue, with ever growing complexity, represents the essential struggle of American Presbyterianism. The evolving resolution of this struggle represents her contribution to Christianity--a balanced theology of authority and doctrinal development.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the boiling point of schism would be reached a second time, when a new catalytic agent would be operative--the 1801 Plan of Union. Entailed in the debate was the issue of the doctrinal authority of the Westminster Confession along with its usual correlate , the fundamental polity question: how tightly is the church government permitted to control the public confession of faith and the public doctrinal development--at least by disciplinary action including control of entrance into the ministry and to membership in the church? Already implicit at this time was the whole issue of true development of doctrine, and the authority needed for it. The question came down to the one: how is the Christian Church to evaluate and discern her contemporaneous listening to Scriptures and her confessing of the faith? Is there any derived authority to the Church's corporate contemporary witness (her confessional statement!) which goes beyond the merely disciplinary sphere?

Almost in direct proportion to the success gained in the struggle for freedom from any radical church authoritarianism was a new theological productivity and creativity--bringing with it new and fuller insights into the theology of authority. In the case of our Presbyterian history this quarantee of theological-freedom as the effect of polity-freedom will appear most clearly in the position taken on the subscription formula--first in the Auburn Affirmation of 1924 and then with the 1967 changes in the Form of Government. In the latter case the simultaneous broadening of the terms of subscription and of the creedal-content (the new Book of Confessions) present the prerequisites for that type of development in doctrine which might enable the future to face even such fundamental issues as the Protestant-Catholic impasse on authority.

Method and Division

In our analysis of American Presbyterianism unlike that of the European origins we will consider the development of polity and doctrine simultaneously. By this point it has been sufficiently shown that they are too closely related to stand apart--though for methodological reasons we considered them separately until now. To bring the key issue quickly to the surface we begin with an historical focal point, the 1924 Auburn Affirmation. It focuses the same issue as the 1967 Confession. We will build our survey about this event, hoping that in its light of hindsight American Presbyterianism will take on a greater coherency.

THE THREE FORCES INVOLVED

The forces of growth operative in any community were present in American Presbyterianism--two in tension (the Abrahamic and Mosaic) and one of unification (the comm-unity force). At this point in her history the tension forces were at a peak and schism again threatened. Robert Hastings Nichols described the forces in terms of groups:

> During its whole history the Presbyterian Church has had within itself two well-defined groups thinking differently about the life of the church. One has tried to hold the church to its own conceptions of doctrine, polity, and methods of work, and when it could has invoked ecclesiastical authority to secure this conformity. The other has maintained that the church should allow liberty and variety in these matters. Its ideal has well been described as that of a "comprehensive church."[5]

The Mosaic Force

The 'Mosaic force' very often expresses itself as a fear, the fear of losing one's doctrinal heritage as a result of losing church authority. This fear has always been one of the central concerns of the more conservative or 'high' churchmen. The real issue is not whether there is need for church authority, but rather what kind of and how much authority is needed. Dowey expresses satisfaction with the American Presbyterian subscription formula in this regard. "Generally, there has prevailed a sensible moderation," Dowey says, "reflecting theological and cultural change. The result has been a broader, more inclusive church than can be derived from the Westminster standards."[6]

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[5] R. H. Nichols, "Fundamentalism in the Presbyterian Church," The Journal of Religion 5 (1925), p. 30.

But 'sensible moderation' did not always prevail. The first quarter of the twentieth century saw the rise of American Christian fundamentalism. "The roots of fundamentalism" writes Robert Nichols, "lie in . . . Scriptural literalism . . . [and in] the modern revival of millenarianism."[7] The connection between the two roots he says is clear: "Not all literalists are millenarians, but all millenarians are literalists."[8] Out of these two roots there developed a conservatism which struck out "against liberal theology and in some degree against the advancing social interpretation of Christianity."[9] Its doctrinal expression was found in a series of pamphlets called "The Fundamentals"[10] published in 1909-1910. Although "The Fundamentals" did not deny to those who held other views the name of Christian, they attacked and condemned the grand sweep of Darwinian thinking especially in its application to theology and biblical criticism. Since more than a quarter of the articles were of Presbyterian origin,[11] and since their religious thinking, centered about the celebrated "five points," found expression in Deliverances of the General Assembly (1910, 1916, and 1923), one may draw a strong connection between "The Fundamentals" and American Presbyterianism, and vice versa.

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[6] Dowey, art. cit., p. 22 (see Introduction, n. 13).

[7] R. H. Nichols, art. cit., p. 14.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 17.

The seat of opposition to this fundamentalistic trend resided in New York's Union and Auburn seminaries. As a result of this opposition in 1915 "the General Assembly declared . . . the [Union] Seminary was in no sense Presbyterian."[12] The center for the conservative side became Philadelphia--much in line with her past and post historical background. The great flood of conservative teaching and interest "came to a climax in the astonishing Philadelphia Prophetic Conference of May, 1918, attended by five thousand or more people from all over the country"[13]--at which Presbyterian presence was prominent. A "statement of belief"[14] was adopted, emphasizing the literalist and millenarist expressions of fundamentalism.

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[10] The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth, 12 vols., (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., 1909-1910).

[11] Nichols, loc. cit.

[12] Ibid., p. 21, cf. Minutes of 1915 G.A., pp. 129-167, esp. pp. 129, 160.

With its "strengthening of the apocalytic temper"[15] World War I was to give the entire movement a new impetus. But it would be the post-war reflections--when "people were acutely dissatisfied with Christianity . . . [which] had failed to prevent the war and other great evils . . . by forsaking the ancient forms of truth"[16]--which gave the final full launching to American Protestant fundamentalism. The movement was especially strong among the Baptists, but it was closely seconded by many Presbyterians. In 1922 even William Jennings Bryan, then a Presbyterian elder, wrote an anti-Darwin book, In His Image: An Answer to Darwinism. In it he gave strict adherence to Fundamentalistic tenets.

But it was in the same year that the venerable Harry Emerson Fosdick, Baptist preacher at the First Presbyterian Church in New York City, anticipated the strong attacks which were to be made on the Northern Baptists by their southern brothers and preached his famous anti-fundamentalist sermon,

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[13] Ibid., p. 22.

[14] Cf. Light in Prophecy: Being and Proceedings and Addresses of the Philadelphia Prophetic Conference, 1918.

[15] Nichols, loc. cit.

[16] Ibid., p. 23.

"Shall the Fundamentalists Win?". Through this sermon and the newspaper publicity given to it, Fundamentalism became a matter of American popular daily concern. Presbyterianism was at stage center.

The Abrahamic Force

Before Fosdick's violent erruption there was a gradual build-up of a more subtle, 'vacuum-type' force favoring the Abrahamic side. "To adopt Santayana's figure," writes Loetscher, "the Church's theology has been living in a modest colonial house more and more overshadowed by the skyscraper of the Church's active work."[17] Getting more specific, he ascribes the occasion for the discovery of this theological vacuum to the rise of neo-orthodoxy in Europe. "This theology," he adds, "was too sophisticated and too antithetical to long prevailing American optimism to secure wide acceptance in the United States, but some of its insights . . . enjoyed increasing vogue."[18] It was to be in a small group of Presbyterian theologians that the hunger-and-vacuum would produce the driving force "to work out . . . [Presbyterianism's] relation to the newer cultural and theological forces . . ."[19] Their hunger would eventually prove to be the stronger force, but prior to victory there would be a final struggle for freedom. "During the years to be viewed," concludes Loetscher, "the Presbyterian Church was forced, in order to preserve unity, to decentralize control over the theological beliefs . . . [while] simultaneously increasing administrative centralization."[20]

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[17] Lefferts A. Loetscher, The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), p. 93.

[18] Ibid., p. 92.

[19] Ibid., p. 94

Having come again to the crucial issue of Church authority, the underlying theology had to focus on ecclesiology. Here there was a great need for development, to the extent that even the liberal anti-fundamentalists were tinged with a fundamentalistic anti-ecclesiasticism. In rejecting ecclesial authoritarianism, they came close to denying the need for any ecclesial authority--in effect enthroning individual over church. We cite the elder Dr. Nichols--definitely an anti-fundamentalist--as an example. In his attack on fundamentalism he comes to what he considers the deepest root of their heresy--namely, their idea of the Church:

> The issue . . . is that of the Protestant Reformation over again. On the fundamentalist side are many earnest Christians, with all their hearts desiring the prosperity of the Christian cause, as there were many such on the side of the Roman church. But the issue once more is the freedom of the Christian man against ecclesiastical authority; and under the God whose truth makes free the outcome is certain.[21]

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[20] Ibid., p. 93.

[21] R. H. Nichols, art. cit., p. 36.

It would take the ensuing years of theological freedom for Protestant progressives to evolve away from their own 'mosaic-fears.' The development would be re-discovered amid their own principles--that in a confessional church it must be the whole church, and not merely the individual, who decides the limits of doctrinal tolerance. Ecclesial authority had to be. The task, however, was to determine the ambit of this authority, to evolve an ecclesiology (or theology of polity) which would theologically explain the dynamics of the church judicatories in relation to the group consensus on doctrine.

Lefferts Loetscher has some interesting comments on the "consensus." Though his comments refer to the aftermath of the crisis period of 1925, *a fortiori* they describe the previous situation as well. Loetscher notes that when the 1925 commission swept away the power previously exercised by the General Assembly to define Church doctrine, there were broad implications involved. It meant that short of the amending-process the Church had no authoritative means of defining its faith. "This fact," he says, " . . . would suggest that the Presbyterian Church is now depending on its group mind rather than on traditional Presbyterian authoritarianism for the preservation of its theological heritage. . . ."[22] Loetscher attributed the deeper origin of this 'group-mind' rediscovery to the development of a more organic conception of the Church. In this conception the Church's theology was felt to be a part of the whole church's life. There was a growing sense of spiritual solidarity, of a common participation in the Christian heritage, and so an increasing weight given to the common-consensus of Christians. "This budding mystical conception of the Church," says Loetscher, "made church splits and divisions for theological or any other reasons less and less palatable to twentieth-century Americans."[23] While praising the New (1967) Presbyterian Confession Dr. B. A. Gerrish of Chicago Divinity echoes Loetscher's broader view of Protestant ecclesiology. He even allows a certain broad-sense application of the concept of infallibility to the church--for any who care for the idea. He adds his own reservation to his allowance:

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[22] Loetscher, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

> . . . The notion of "infallibility" is more flexible than is commonly supposed, and there may be fully acceptable senses in which the Scriptures are infallible--the church, too, though Presbyterians are not required to believe this . . . But infallibility has come to be indentified with inerrancy, and the inerrancy has been extended to all conceivable matters under the sun. Infallibility so understood is irrelevant to the fundamental Reformation claim that the Word--and especially the living word of the church's proclamation--is the principal means by which Christ gives himself to his people. . . ."[24]

For our present purpose Gerrish helps us see the direction for future inquiry.

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[23] Ibid., p. 94.

[24] B. A. Gerrish, "The New Presbyterian Confession," The Christian Century 83, No. 18 (May 4, 1966), p. 594.

As a final voice, and witness to this ecclesiological development, we listen to Dr. James Nichols who in his reflections on the new Confession broadens the earlier pre-ecumenical statement made by his father. Nichols begins his reflection by proclaiming the demise of biblical fundamentalism: " . . . the section as a whole clearly releases the Church from any commitment to biblical literalism and fundamentalism."[25] With the deemphasis of any tendency to bibliolatry, Nichols notes a new understanding of ecclesiastical tradition. Rather than reject the older Confessions, the Church honors them and uses them. The real question Nichols points out is "how much truth value do they have." He writes:

> . . . The Church thus "acknowledges itself aided in understanding the Gospel by the testimony of the Church from earlier ages and from many lands . . ." The question is how far they are subject to interpretation in the light of the special circumstances of the time and thus to consequent relativization. The Presbyterians acknowledge the opinions they have held in the past but specifically affirm "no one statement is irreformable."[26]

Nichols chooses words carefully. Somewhere between 'consequent relativization' on the one side and 'acknowledges the [past] opinions' on the other lies the permanent tradition. At least we have an epistemology of faith which is more deeply cognisant of the ecclesial dimension--and consequently open to some degree of interpretative-ecclesial-authority. The Bible as the 'only infallible rule of faith' has given way to the living Word guiding the Church by His Spirit in her task of interpreting and proclaiming the gospel to all manking.

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[25] J. H. Nichols, "Ecumenical Aspects of the Confession of 1967," The Ecumenist 6, No. 1 (Nov.-Dec., 1967), p. 108 (italics ours).

[26] Ibid. (italics ours).

Thus what began in 'Mosaic fear' was to uncover lost theological mines as the neo-orthodox theology came to late bloom in America. The new recognition given to the 'ecclesial dimension' in the proclamation of the word included the whole 'community of the Spirit' and the whole 'people of God', not merely an authoritarian clergy, nor merely the individual. The primacy lay with the 'whole people.' Clerical hierarchy are servants of the people subject to their common good. With the freedom of each individual being theologically guaranteed, the final question asks itself: may not, does not, and ought not the individual work out this freedom in an act of faith made within the faith of the 'whole people of God,' the 'community of the Spirit,' which is Christ's Body? And if the Mosaic force stresses this freely-determined giving to an 'ordered,' authority-bearing body, then, rather than denying freedom it is called 'into service' to safeguard it from any abuse and to enhance freedom's proper functioning in the community. As such the Mosaic force is an essential complement to the proper functioning of the Abrahamic force and to the properly balanced functioning of the church community. Such is the ideal. Now we go back to the real in its struggle for this ideal.

Force for Comm-unity and Unification

The third force which will reflect itself throughout the entire American Presbyterian controversy will be the force for comm-unity and unification, and so for inclusive Churchism as opposed to narrow denominational exclusivism. As implied throughout it would be this force which, possessed by the moderate parties of both other forces, would effect the working balance.

The occasion for the release of this force for unity is again assigned by Loetscher to World War I (which he also said occasioned fundamentalism).[27] But on a deeper level Loetscher roots the comm-unity force in the "more mystical and organic conception of the Church."[28] Ecclesiology would have its effects on the whole of theology: "the theological effect of emphases on cooperation and union was of course to minimalize theological particularities and differences and to stress broader theological similarities . . ."[29]

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[27] Loetscher, Broadening Church, p. 100.

[28] Ibid., p. 93.

[29] Ibid.

And more than theological effects, the unity forces had their apostolic and practical expressions as well. In 1906, after nearly a century apart, the United Presbyterian Church was re-joined with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. This happened almost automatically in the wake of the theological development away from any pre-deterministic interpretation of Calvinism coupled with a subscription formula which reflected the proper balance of ecclesiastical authority and theological freedom. By the close of World War I the unification or "community" force was to reach new heights of enthusiasm. Thus at the General Assembly of 1918 thirty-five Presbyteries submitted an overture[30] proposing an organic union with all evangelical Churches in the United States. The plan was badly defeated by the presbyteries, but it was to have an important influence in later development. "The chief significance . . .," notes Loetscher, "is that the proposal . . . heightened the theological controversy of 1922 to 1936 which had long been pending . . ."[31] Preceding 1922, "exclusive principles of churchmanship truimphed completely . . . [whereas] inclusive principles gained the ascendency in the controversy which followed . . ."[32] Shortly after the General Assembly of 1923, the forces of freedom would begin to move.

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[30] Ibid., p. 100; see Mins. 1918, p. 153.

[31] Ibid., brackets ours.

[32] Ibid.

By way of conclusion to this section we could say that the extreme segments of the two controversial forces were fast polarizing into mutually unbalanced positions regarding church authority and regarding church union. " . . . If during the two decades under view," Loetscher writes, "forces of ecclesiastical inclusiveness were developing . . .; there were also unmistakable signs that those who opposed change were coming to a new group consciousness . . ."[33] Soon the last great Presbyterian conflict errupted with different opinions as to exactly where to place its beginning. Some dated the beginning from the discussed merger of the evangelical Churches in the United States, 1918-20; others from a sermon by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick in May 1922. But there was common agreement that a group of issues marked a new stage in the growth of the Church.[34] When the battle was over one conclusion was certain. It would take all three forces--Mosaic, Abrahamic, and comm-unity--to effect the growth of American Presbyterianism. The presence and interrelationships of these forces--now more of one, now of the other--may be thought of in terms of the following description of community proffered by the late John Courtney Murray. He sees the force of community as unifying the energies of the tension-forces of freedom and authority (our abrahamic-mosaic):

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[33] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[34] See *Ibid.*, pp. 103-04.

> The skeleton remains; the classical conception of the *vertical* relationship of authority and freedom. But it needs to assume a more Christian and therefore more human form by standing forth in the living flesh and blood that is the Christian community. More abstractly, the vertical relationship of command-obedience needs to be completed by the horizontal relationship of dialogue between authority and the free Christian community. The two relationships do not cancel, but reciprocally support, each other.
>
> This more adequate understanding of the ecclesial relationship *does not* indeed *dissolve* the *inevitable tension* between freedom and authority. But by situating this perennial polarity within the *living context of community*, *it can* serve to *make the tension healthy and creative*, releasing the energies radiant from both poles for their one common task, which is to build the beloved community.[35]

THE AUBURN AFFIRMATION

Introduction and Document

The Auburn Affirmation of 1924 was a direct counterattack by the growing liberal minority in the Presbyterian Church on the "five-point"fundamentalistic doctrinal-deliverances of the General Assemblies of 1919, 1916, and 1923. These deliverances declared the five-fundamental-points to be "essential doctrines" and the General Assembly attempted *to impose* them as a minimal theological-confessional requirement for the licensing of ministerial candidates.

First published in January 1924 under the official title

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[35] John C. Murray, "Freedom, Authority, Community," *America* 115, No. 23 (Dec. 3, 1966), p. 741.

An Affirmation Designed to Safeguard the Unity and Liberty of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the "Auburn Affirmation" held the signatures of 150 Presbyterian ministers. Republished in May 1924 it had 1274 signatures. Between the two editions, in March, the opposition, largely from the Presbytery of Philadelphia, sent an "overture" to the General Assembly requesting: ". . . that all representatives of the Church . . . reaffirm their adherence to the doctrinal standards of the church, particularly as these were interpreted in the deliverances of the General Assemblies containing the Five Points."[36] The decision of the General Assembly would be crucial. It would determine the future of the American Presbyterian Church to an extent which we cannot yet fully determine.

In reply, the signatories of the "Auburn Affirmation," after confessing their loyalty to the Church, attempted to show that from its history and its law the Church assured to its ministers liberty in the interpretation of the Confession and the Scriptures, and " . . . that when the General Assembly declared that certain doctrines were 'essential,' they acted unconstitutionally, since for the declaration of . . . doctrine . . . the concurrence of the presbyteries was required by the Constitution."[37] Because its historical argument gives a concise survey of American Presbyterian Polity, and since its words reflect the 'spirit' of the forces we have just described, we will quote this important document _verbatim_. It sets the stage for all that follows:

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[36] Nichols, Hist., p. 221, see Presbyterian, Mar. 13, 1924.

[37] Ibid., p. 222.

> . . . For the maintenance of the faith of our church, the preservation of its unity, and the protection of the liberties of its ministers and people, we offer this Affirmation.
>
> I. By its law and its history, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America safeguards the liberty of thought and teaching of its ministers. At their ordination they "receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures." This the Church has always considered _a sufficient doctrinal subscription_ for its ministers. Manifestly it does not require their assent to the very words of the confession, or to all of its teachings, or to interpretations of the Confession by individuals or church courts. The Confession itself disclaims infallibility. Its authors would not allow this to church councils, their own included . . . (XXXI, iii). The Confession also expressly asserts the liberty of Christian believers, and condemns the submission of the mind or conscience to any human authority . . . (XX, ii).
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> With respect to the interpretation of the Scriptures the position . . . has been that common to Protestants. "The Supreme Judge," says the Confession of Faith, "by whom all controversies are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions and ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture (Conf. I, x)." Accordingly our church has held that the supreme guide in the interpretation of the Scriptures is not, as it is with the Roman Catholics, ecclesiastical authority but the Spirit of God, speaking to the Christian believer . . .
>
> There is no assertion in the Sacred Scriptures that their writers were kept "from error." The Confession of Faith does not make this assertion and [it] is not to be found in the Apostles' Creed or the

Nicene Creed or in any of the great Reformation confessions. The doctrine of inerrancy, intended to enhance the authority of the Sacred Scriptures, in fact impairs their Supreme authority for faith and life, and weakens the testimony of the church to the power of God unto salvation thru Jesus Christ. We hold that the General Assembly of 1923, in asserting that "the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide, and move the writers of the Holy Scripture as to keep them from error," spoke without warrant of the Sacred Scriptures or of the Confession of Faith. We hold rather to the words of the Confession of Faith, that the Scriptures "are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life (Conf. I, ii)."

II. While it is constitutional for any General Assembly "to bear testimony against error in doctrine," (Formation of Government XII, v), yet such testimony is without binding authority, since the constitution of our church provides that its doctrine shall be declared only by concurrent action of the General Assembly and the presbyteries. Thus the Church guards the statement of its doctrine against hasty or ill considered action by either General Assembly or presbyteries. From this provision . . ., it is evident that neither in one General Assembly nor in many, without concurrent action of the presbyteries, is there authority to declare what the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America believes and teaches and that the assumption that any General Assembly has authoritatively declared what the church believes and teaches is groundless. A declaration by a General Assembly that any doctrine is "an essential doctrine" attempts to amend the constitution of the church in an unconstitutional manner.

III. The General Assembly of 1923, in asserting that "doctrines contrary to the stand of the Presbyterian Church" have been preached in the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church of New York City, virtually pronounced a judgment against this church . . . with knowledge that the matter . . . was already under formal consideration in the Presbytery of New York, as is shown by the language of its action. The General Assembly acted in the case without giving hearing to the parties concerned . . . without using the method of conference, patience and love enjoined on us by Jesus Christ . . .

> IV. The General Assembly of 1923 expressed the opinion concerning five doctrinal statements that each one "is an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards. On the constitutional grounds . . . before described, we are opposed to any attempt to elevate these five [doctrinal statements] . . . to the position of tests for ordination or for good standing in our church.
>
> Furthermore, this [opinion] of the General Assembly attempts to commit our church to certain theories concerning the inspiration of the Bible . . . Some of us regard the particular theories . . . as satisfactory explanations of these facts and doctrines. But . . . these are not the only theories allowed by Scriptures and our standards. . . .
>
> V. We do not desire liberty to go beyond the teachings of evangelical Christianity. But we maintain that it is our Constitutional right and our Christian duty within these limits to exercise liberty of thought and teaching, that we may more effectively preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World.
>
> VI. Finally, we deplore the evidences of division in our beloved church, in the face of a world so desperately in need of a united testimony . . .[38]

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[38] Armstrong, Hist., pp. 285-87. Actually there was an historical precedent [which we shall see] to Auburn. There had been an earlier attempt by the General Assembly to define the "essentials of doctrine" with regard to the inerrancy dispute in the 1892 Portland deliverance. In a perfect forerunner to the Auburn Affirmation 235 ministers of the moderate party urged unity in their Plea for Peace and Work (Feb. 17, 1893): "We remember that there have been two sad periods in the history of our church in which this has happened. That our Church has been twice rent asunder by issues which have been recognized shortly afterwards as unnecessary. We dread the possibility of having such a painful experience repeated. . . . For this reason we deprecate any and every attempt to impose new tests of orthodoxy, or to restrict the liberty hitherto enjoyed by those who sincerely subscribe to the essential and necessary articles of the Presbyterian Church.

The Decision of the General Assembly and Its Aftermath

The General Assembly of 1924 decided that the *additional doctrinal tests* proposed by the Philadelphia overture *were unconstitutional* as the *Auburn Affirmation* had contended. It wasn't until the General Assembly of 1925, however, that the whole issue concerning the liberty and sole right of the Presbytery in the matter of licensure (a cherished Constitutional liberty!) and that the even more key issue concerning the Assembly's authority to prescribe doctrine for the church were brought to their final definition. Nichols describes the scene at the Assembly as a crucial one. "The atmosphere in the Assembly" he writes, "was so charged with danger and revolt and schism that the Moderator took the floor and proposed the appointment of a special commission to consider 'the causes of unrest in the church.'"[39] The Special Commission made its re-

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Especially would we deplore any hasty decision by informal resolution or by judicial decision, to the confessional statement of the doctrine of Holy Scripture. We hold firmly to the teaching of the first chapter of the Confession of Faith, and to the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practise. We do not express any individual opinion in regard to the theory of inerrancy of the original autographs of Scripture in matters which are not essential to religion, but . . . we protest unitedly and firmly against making assent to it a test of Christian faith, or of good standing in the Presbyterian ministry."

[39] Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

ports to the General Assembly in 1926 and 1927.[40] They steered a careful course in mentioning neither the 'Auburn Affirmation' nor Dr. Machen's controversial manifesto for the conservative position.[41] And yet a comparison of the documents shows that the greater part of the Auburn Affirmation's theological argument and all of its constitutional argument became the official position of the Church.[42]

The third main section of the Report treated the 'Constitutional Principle of Unity with its Historical Background.' The chairman was Dr. Hugh T. Kerr whose obvious goal was to set the whole problem in its larger historical context. The report, based on the survey of the Church's four controversies, concluded that the Christian principle of toleration was founded on the Church's constitution and "that the Presbyterian system admits diversity of view where the core of truth is identical."[43]

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[40] Cf. Minutes of the General Assembly, 1926, pp. 62-87; Mins., 1927, pp. 58-86.

[41] Dr. J. Gresham Machen's book, Christianity and Liberalism, went so far as to declare that "Christianity and liberalism were essentially two different religions." In 1936 Dr. Machen and his Princeton followers withdrew from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and established his own "Presbyterian Church of America" (later "The Orthodox Presbyterian Church"--which itself had a splinter group, "The Bible Presbyterian Synod.")

[42] See Loetscher, Broadening Church, p. 134.

[43] Mins.,1926, pp. 77-80, as quoted in Loetscher, op. cit., p. 131.

To lend balance to the side of ecclesiastical authority the commission said that it was not the individual's task but that of the Church to decide the limits of toleration "either generally by amendment of the Constitution, or particularly by Presbyterial authority, subject to the constitutional right of appeal."[44] By this statement the commission alleviated the fears of many--assuring them that "toleration does not involve any lowering of the standards. It does not weaken the testimony of the Church as to its assured convictions."[45]

The fourth section of the report dealt with the 'Power of the General Assembly.' Here the commission pointed out that the General Assembly was different from Synod which it superceded. The General Assembly was a delegated body with a written constitution over it, whereas the General Synod was composed of all the ministers and a representative of every congregation in the Church without a written constitution. The report[46] asserted also that the Assembly could make deliverances, but that they were subject to modification or repeal by a majority vote. Above all it asserted that the Assembly could not amend the constitution by either legislative or executive deliverance but only by the joint action of Assembly and Presbyteries. Thus the Assembly's 'five point" deliverances could not be binding. Concerning licensure and ordination the Auburn Affirmation was again sustained. The powers of the General Assembly were delegated by the Presbyteries who held the general and "inherent" powers. Thus the commission noted that the Adopting Act conferred no authority on any judicatory body to state what doctrines were "essential and necessary" to all candidates. Only in specific cases could a judgment be made as to whether a candidate's position constituted the rejection of an "essential and necessary" article of faith--and this judicatory had to be the ordaining body (which now meant the Presbytery).

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[44] Loetscher, op. cit., pp. 131-34.

[45] Ibid.

[46] See Loetscher, op. cit., pp. 131-34, citing Mins. 1926, pp. 82-84 and Mins. 1927, pp. 58-62.

This leaves one crucial issue--the difference between a declaratory deliverance and a judicatory decision especially pertaining to the issue of "essential and necessary articles." This matter is handled delicately by the Report, first concerning declaratory deliverances, then judicial decisions. Declaratory deliverances witness to the Church's corporate faith. As such the report[47] warned that whereas the Assembly could make such deliverances about "essential and necessary articles" such a course risked being misconstrued as a virtual emendation of the Constitution. When acting in its judicial capacity the

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[47] See ibid., p. 134, citing Mins. 1927, pp. 80-81.

General Assembly had the right to decide only specific cases. Thus the report decided decisively against the deliverances of 1910, 1916, and 1923. The only way an Assembly could declare any article essential would be to quote the exact language of the Confession. It could not paraphrase, and much less could it make "inferences or derived statements" into doctrines.

Although the official victory came with the General Assembly's approval of the Report of the 1925 Commission, American Presbyterianism's turning-point came when the ministers drew up and signed the Auburn Affirmation. The entire struggle was not over even then, but something significant had taken place. The Church had "finally felt its way toward an open recognition of the full-right of moderate liberals to be ministers and officials."[48] Concerning the importance of this event Loetscher makes the following comment--pointing out its future implications:

> The work of this Special Commission of 1925 was therefore a turning point in the theological history of the Church since the union of 1869. It meant that moderate theological liberalism would have what it had unsuccessfully sought almost since the reunion, an acknowledged and assured place in the Church's life and thought. By assuring to local presbyteries greater autonomy and theological liberty at a time when the administrative functions of the Church had long been becoming more centralized, the commission made important concessions to cultural

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

> pluralism and theological diversity, concessions which were necessary to preserve the Church's unity . . .
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> But in sweeping away by a stroke of interpretation much of the previously exercised power of the General Assembly to define and thus to preserve the Church's doctrine, the commission established a principle, which has much broader implications than the Church has yet had occasion to draw from it.[49]

The implication which was to prove most important was one we have seen earlier. It bears repeating:

> If the Church now has no means of authoritatively defining its faith short of the amending process--which could hardly function in the midst of sharp controversy--ecclesiastical power is seriously hindered for the future from preventing more radical theological innovations . . . This fact . . . would suggest that the Presbyterian Church is now depending on its group mind rather than on traditional Presbyterian authoritarianism. . . .[50]

Thus the seeds of new theological freedom were sewn. The abrahamic forces were set free to search for truth and unity. To many the risk involved in this "free-wheeling" milieu was too great. For them it was as good as having "no confession at all." What was really asked was an act of faith in the basic reality of the church itself, the whole church as the community-of-the-Spirit--not merely the 'official church.' This 'whole church' must listen and live always 'on the edge' of new decision.

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[49] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[50] *Ibid.*, italics ours.

CONCLUDING FORESIGHT

Toward the 1967 Confession

Before looking backwards to the historical antecedents of Auburn we look forward for a glimpse of the act of faith which the United Presbyterian Church made in itself as 'the reconciling community of the Spirit.' If the risk of broad-churchism is that of a certain theological-shallowness, it is justified by the very meaning of faith and confession of faith. If God respects our freedom as the faint image of His own and freely chooses to reveal Himself through it in a living way, then we must begin with the premise of responsibility, alacrity, and trust in our own freedom under the Spirit.

The four decades following the "Auburn Affirmation" and "1925 Commission Report" would see the sleeping freedom and the sleeping theology come to life, and this primarily in practical ways--reforming and broadening the theological curriculum in the seminaries, and reforming the catechetical program. Finally and above all this new life expressed itself on the level of the entire community, reforming, broadening, and deepening the content of their Confession of faith. To the theologian this would bring a corresponding growth-in-understanding of the very "process of growth-in-faith."

Being more concrete, the most significant advance in our understanding of the faith-process pertained to the place of the

Bible in God's living revelation. It consisted in a long awaited breakthrough, or "break-away from" the fundamentalistic notion of the Bible as "the only infallible rule of faith and practice" to the liberating view of the Bible as "the witness and the instrument of the revelation of the Word in the living church;"[51] together with the much broader outlook on the witness of tradition, concretely reflected by adopting into the community a Book of Confessions with its corresponding broadening of the 'traditional' resource-material for theological reflection. Doors were consequently opened to real theological development. Above all it would evidence itself in "the remarkable advances in the doctrine of revelation."[52]

Pari-passu, and still in the concrete, there were most significant changes in the 'subscription question,' and so in the matter of church 'order' or 'polity'. Herein, there was a duplex broadening: first of all the obvious one in content subscribed-to corresponding to the new Book of Confessions; and secondly, and more significantly, in the quality of strictness of the subscription or, really we should say, in the theology of subscription. From the original 1729 Adopting Act with its subscription to Westminster "as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scripture" or according to its "essential and necessary articles," the Church was always unwilling or unable to give a constitutional definition to the meaning of her subscription formula. This resulted in conflict for the church and in conscience-problems for the individual. The subscription-formula of 1967 would move to a broader spectrum than is accurately expressed by 'system of doctrine,' and, accordingly, to a new formula:

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[51] "The Proposed Confession of 1967: 1. Introductory Comment and Analysis," Report . . . on A Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith, p. 29.

[52] Ibid., p. 42.

> The present proposal . . . recognizes the existing procedure, allows for the broadened confessional base of the Book of Confessions, and affirms the rule of Christ through the Bible by way of the confessions as follows: "Will you perform the duties of a minister of the gospel in obedience to [Jesus] Christ, under the authority of the Scriptures, and [under] the [continuing instruction and] guidance of the confessions of this Church?[53]

All this is now by way of foresight. It shall be further explored in its own chapter. It can simply be said for now that in 1967 the Presbyterian Church's act of faith restored the primacy of its focus to the Word of God as source, norm, and object of their faith-life. Her new Form of Government reads: " . . . The Church now confesses that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, . . . is the source and norm of faith and life."[54]

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[53] Ibid., p. 41 (Brackets are ours; they add the corrections made in the finally accepted constitutional version).

[54] Form of Government, Chap. XVII, Section 7.

Beyond 1967

It is very probable that this new theological freedom, which for American Presbyterianism received its Magna Carta with the Auburn Affirmation, has received merely its first expression in the New Book of Confessions. As with Pope John's Vatican II the emphasis of the Confession of 1967 was placed on breathing-fresh-air. The hoped for outcome was the further reconciliation of all mankind. As part of this primary reconciliation it was hoped there would be a new effort at theological-reconciliation. Thus in his commentary Dr. James Nichols emphasizes the primary reconciliation: "As with Vatican Council II these declarations do not attempt to settle controversy . . . Rather their vision is to liberate the People of God for more effective mission to the world."[55] The issue of theological-reconciliation is approached by Dr. Gerrish as an open-ended task:

> I am left with the uneasy feeling that the fundamental task of confessional revision remains undone. For surely what the church really needs is precisely what the drafting committee modestly declined to give us: a comprehensive-but succinct--restatement of the Christian faith which would be at once both Reformed and contemporary. We have not quite faced with candor the question: What is our distinctively Reformed witness (if there is one)? . . . To be modern is not to go a-whoring after the latest theological novelty: it means remaining absolutely loyal to our past heritage and

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[55] J. H. Nichols, art. cit. (note 15), p. 110.

> yet so "transforming" it that it will capture minds and hearts and imaginations that must do their believing in the present. The task of preparing a new Presbyterian confession, comprehensive in scope, is still ahead of us. It will call for an uncomfortable tension between historical loyalty and relentless criticism. . . . I hope Presbyterians are going to approve the proposed revision . . . But I hope even more that we shall not then be in for another sabbath-rest.[56]

A brief projection into the future could envision Gerrish's parenthetical hypothesis--"Reformed witness (if there is one)--as a real question. As with other denominations the Reformed Churches are developing and changing their narrow doctrines, as for example, their doctrines on Decrees and Scriptural authority. (We will later mention Catholicism's development concerning ecclesiology, revelation, and religious-freedom). Already many of the delimitations of denominational uniqueness have been blurred. All Christians are becoming more wary of absolute-negativism in their theology--"no, impossible, never true." This is to respect the Reform principle of openness--openness even to previous closednesses.

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[56] Gerrish, art. cit., p. 585.

CHAPTER FOUR

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANISM: IN SCHISM

INTRODUCTION

Introductory Remarks

In the historical-antecedents we will search for the origins of the development we have already outlined as well as for possible signs of future development. This chapter on the two American Presbyterian schisms will present the origins of the polity-struggle discussed at Auburn in 1924 and in the 1967 Form of Government. The next chapter on Confessional-revision will give the origins of the 1967 Confession's doctrinal-reform on Scriptural authority. Reflecting on the entire process one sees "development" and is helped in evolving a theology of development.

With regard to the Presbyterian schisms our own era sheds some light. One might say that we are 'at the dawn' of the schismless era due to the universal discovery of the principle of religious freedom with its consequent tolerance for diversity. But before this dawn there was the 'previous night.' It was dark and the need for evolution was great. The "radicalism" we have already seen in the European origins of Presbyterianism actually bespoke a failure to recognize, or just a plain ignorance of, the dignity and freedom of man. No Christian denomination at the time rated very highly in this religious-toleration-quotient. The world was shrouded in an aura of protectivism and defensivism with regard to a heritage already grown too old. And the church was over-identified with this world. With the transmigration to the new continent came the evolution of civil democracy in the course of which religious evolution was influenced by, and exerted an influence on , the socio-political scene.

A note on the histories and historians might help us understand the following survey. The three men on whom we rely for our history of Colonial Presbyterianism--Briggs, Hodge, and Trinterud--were Presbyterian churchmen very much involved in the history they were recording. (Trinterud still is.) Consequently their histories must be interpretative. This is especially true when they write about some past phase from the context of their own 'tension-situation.' In general the 'particular perspectives'of the men will be obvious.

COLONIAL PRESBYTERIANISM: THE FIRST SCHISM

Introduction

The three operative forces which we have seen in later American Presbyterian history made clear appearances in her early history. The law-authority ("mosaic") force evidenced itself in the subscription struggle, first resolved and later re-resolved by the Adopting Act of 1729. The freedom-seeking ("abrahamic") force was to manifest its presence in the phenomenon described as "the Great Awakening," the first of the American revivals. Finally the unitive or community force would express itself as the integrating force in the Reunion of 1759 as well as in the force for ecumenical expansion.

Ireland's Precedent for the Adopting Act of 1729

Looking briefly at the subscription picture in Britain there are certain precedents for the American scene especially among the Scots and Irish. Recall the 'Solemn League and Covenant' which the Scots demanded all at Westminster to make. Then in 1693 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland obeyed Parliament's request for subscription by all her ministers.[1] The predominant mind however in England and to a lesser degree in Ireland, even aside from the fact that their state-churches were Episcopal, was away from forced subscription. This harmonizes with what we found to be the 'spirit' of Westminster itself. An emergency issue however, the outbreak of Semi-arianism in the ranks of the ministry in Dublin and soon afterwards in England, occasioned a major subscription controversy.[2] The issue divided churchmen into two camps. In 1705 the youngest and ablest ministers of Ireland joined together under John Abernathy to form the "Belfast Society" which was in favor of "broad Presbyterianism."[3] The Society "became so strong that it furnished five out of six moderators of the Irish Synod between 1709 and 1716."[4] When in 1717 one of their Professors, Simson from Glasgow, was brought to trial for Socinianism and Arminianism, the outcome resulted in a warning against "venting such opinions or hypotheses . . .[not] commonly used by orthodox divines and not evidently found in Scripture."[5] This did not settle the real issue, which Briggs describes well: "His real fault was that he was endeavoring . . . to explain orthodox doctrines in the terminology, methods, and thought of his age: while his adversaries were clinging to the old forms of statements in the scholastic divines . . ."[6] A final event, a sermon preached by John Abernathy on "Religious obedience founded on personal persuasion" followed by two pamphlets against subscription brought on the peace-making action of the Synod, the Pacific Act of 1720.

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[1] Briggs, Hist., p. 200. The formula went as follows (cf. ibid.): "I do sincerely own and declare the above Confession of Faith approved by former General Assemblies of this Church, and ratified by law in the year 1690, to be the Confession of my faith and that I own the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine, which I will constantly adhere to."

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[2] Ibid., p. 194.

[3] See ibid., p. 201: "When [the Irish ministers] . . . returned [from exile in Scotland], many of them were inclined to follow their Scottish brethren so far as possible. In 1698, the Synod of Ulster resolved 'that young men licensed to preach be obliged to subscribe to our Confession of Faith in all the articles thereof, as the Confession of their faith . . ."

[4] Ibid., p. 203

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

The Pacific Act is of great importance, for it is the basis of the American Presbyterian Adopting Act. Its subscription formula was very broad and a definite compromise compared to that which was desired by the subscriptionist-party. "Whereas the Scotch Adopting Act of 1690 uses the phrase 'as containing the sum and substance of the doctrine of the Reformed Churches,'" writes Briggs, "the Irish Pacific Act contains the clause 'as being a good abridgement of the Christian doctrines contained in the sacred Scriptures.'"[7] Briggs notes the important difference: the Scotch Act refers to the doctrine of the Reformed Churches, the Irish to Christian doctrines. "The American Act," he tells us, "agrees with the latter [while it] gives a still further qualification . . . 'only in all the essential and necessary articles.'"[8] It is important to point out that the Irish Pacific Act did not work for long before both sides were dissatisfied. The inevitable happened and the Irish Presbyterians went into schism.[9]

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[7] Ibid., p. 218.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See ibid., p. 208, "In 1726 the subscribers and non-subscribers came to an open rupture at Dungannon. The ministers were equally divided . . . , but the elders were on the side of subscription. The ministers declining to subscribe were excluded, and organized themselves into the Presbytery of Antrim . . . "

The Subscription Issue Reaches America

In America the first Presbyterian Synod was formed in 1706 and its constituency clearly represented the two parties and the two forces we have just seen in Britain.[10] The 'more cosmopolitan' party was led by Jonathan Dickinson for whom Briggs saves his highest praise: "Dickinson was the ablest man . . . in the colonial period. It is due chiefly to him that the Church was not split into fragments representing and perpetuating the differences of Presbyterians in the Mother countries . . ."[11] The more conservative strain was led by the Scots-Irish element whose number was increasing annually at this time.[12] Their spokesman became John Thomson of the Newcastle Presbytery. "The hatred," writes Trinterud, "that the Scots and Scotch-Irish had for the old England no doubt colored their attitude toward the "new" England . . ."[13] Thus the more liberal group ". . . feared they would have to suffer the same fate . . .[as] the minority groups of Scotland and

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[10] Trinterud, Hist., p. 43.

[11] Briggs, Hist., p. 215.

[12] Thus Armstrong's history, op. cit., p. 21 says: "In the half century following 1717 it has been estimated that some two hundred thousand Scotch-Irish emigrated to America. Poor, land-hungry, boisterous and contentious, these people were also tenaciously Presbyterian . . ."

[13] Trinterud, Hist., p. 47. See also Hodge, Hist. I, p. 169, who also describes the difference in terms of "independentism" and "presbyterianism."

Ireland once the Scotch-Irish group gained the weapon of compulsory subscription."[14] Soon the two forces would erupt into open conflict over the subscription issue.

The founding fathers of the Synod had agreed that the Church was totally independent of any and all of the Scotch, Irish, or English Presbyterian Churches. They never officially adopted any confessional statements. "By common consent alone they have been following the Westminster Standards."[15] The Synod itself was essentially a meeting of ministers and it only gradually assumed the functions of Presbyterian government. Briggs tells us: "Their Presbyterianism was not of a sterotyped sort, . . . but was flexible, like the English and Dublin Presbyterianism, and developed naturally from its own inherent vitality, and adapted itself to the circumstances of the New World."[16] For a time this original freedom was maintained by pacificatory-articles and by the desire of the moderates of both groups to allow the Church to grow. But the subscriptionist-forces pressed relentlessly. The opposing voices were those of John Thomson and Jonathan Dickinson.

As President of the 1722 Synod Jonathan Dickinson argued for non-subscription. Dickinson proposed:

> . . . that the Bible was a sufficient rule; . . . that if it is said that an official interpretation of the Bible is necessary . . . , [this would

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 46.

[16] Briggs, Hist., p. 208.

> be] the argument of the authoritarianism of Rome and the Anglicans. When this is done, the official interpretation, and not the Bible itself, becomes the rule of faith and life. It would . . . supercede the Bible as the Authority over men's consciences. Moreover the creedal statements may by virtue of theological controversy actually cease to be rules of faith . . . and become things in and for themselves . . . exactly what the Church of Rome and the Church of England and others have done in the name of tradition. Against such usurpations the Fathers of Presbyterianism had taken their stand on the all sufficiency of sacred Scripture.[17]

By 1724 the Presbytery of Newcastle had already entered on their records a formula expressing adherence to the Westminster Confession and candidates for licensure were obliged to sign: "I do own the Westminster Confession as the Confession of my faith."[18] As such this was a premature usurpation of the Synod's right, and so in 1727 John Thomson proposed a formal 'Overture' to the Synod. In it Thomson argued:

> "We are so broad a church as not to be a part of any particular church in the world and therefore if we do not exert the authority inherent in us for maintaining the purity of the gospel truth, it is not in the power of any superior ecclesiastical judicature to call us in question for our neglect, or for our errors or heresies . . .
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> Although, I hope, there are as yet few or none among us (especially of the ministers) who are infected with any gross errors or heresies in doctrine, yet I think I may say we are in no small danger of being corrupted in doctrinals, and that even as to fundamentals . . .

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[17] J. Dickinson, A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Synod at Philadelphia Sept. 18, 1722, quoted in Trinterud, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

[18] Briggs, Hist., p. 210.

> When Arminianism, Socinianism, Deism, Free thinking, etc. do like a deluge overflow even the reformed churches, both established and dissenting, to such a degree, have we not reason to consult our own safety?"[19]

Dickinson's reply again rises from the depths of his 'abrahamic' vitality. He argued that imposing subscription on others was "invading _his_ royalty who is sole king and lawgiver to his church . . . [and that] in making this subscription the term of admitting candidates to the ministry men may be kept out of Christ's vineyard, whom he has sent to labour there . . ."[20]

The dilemma for all confessional churches had thus come to the fore: can the human and the divine ever be truly unified? Can humanly formulated confessions ever serve as a faithful and truthful media for the divine revelation? Hodge cornered Dickinson on this issue: "It is obvious . . . that President Dickinson belonged to that small class of persons who are opposed to all creeds of human composition. The sense of the Christian world on this point is against him . . . "[21] Finally 'a compromise' was made--the _Adopting Act_ of 1729 by which American Presbyterianism averted her first crisis. Involved here however was far more than appeared. Underneath was the all important problem of Church authority and revelation. Authority and governmental structure were seen as necessary safeguards against the limitations of human freedom; but the limitations of this governmental authority needed themselves a check and balance in order to safeguard human freedom. This tension is all the more heightened when the Christian-revelational-element is introduced. Here the central goal and focus is the proclaiming of God's revelational-faith-gift which man can in no way presume. Nor can he legislate as to when the gift is to be given. He can only receive and then limitedly understand how human media were God's instruments and witnesses in the revelational process.

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[19] Hodge, _Hist_. I, 163-64. Hodge indicates that this 'overture' was not included in the minutes, although it was printed.

[20] _Ibid_., p. 171, taken from Mr. Hazard's MSS.

[21] _Ibid_.

The key to this basic problem would be in first recognizing and then respecting the necessary reciprocality of these two forces in the process of revelational growth--human freedom and ecclesial authority. Their reciprocal function is not primarily negative--"safeguarding against each other's limitations," but positive and progressive--proclaiming the Word with ever deeper understanding.

The Adopting Act of 1729 and Its Interpretations

The first part of the 'compromise' Adopting Act of 1729 was a preamble explaining what was to be understood by subscription. The preamble set clear limits to the powers of the Synod:

> Although the Synod do not claim or pretend to any authority of imposing our faith upon other men's consciences, . . . and do utterly disclaim all legislative power and authority in the Church, being willing to . . . admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances, all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the kingdom of heaven, yet we are undoubtedly obliged to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be kept pure . . . , and so handed down to our posterity;--and do therefore agree that all the ministers of this Synod . . . _shall declare their agreement in the Confession of Faith_, with the larger and shorter Catechisms of . . . Westminster, _as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine, and_ so also _adopt the said Confession_ and Catechisms _as_ the _confession of our faith_ . . .[22]

The afternoon session took up the issue of scruples; and even made a listing of same. Concerning scruples the preamble had said:

> And in case any minister or any candidate . . . shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles . . . , he shall at the time of his making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him . . . , if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such scruple or mistake to be only about articles _not_ essential and necessary in doctrine, worship, or government. But if the Synod or Presbytery _shall_ judge such ministers . . . erroneous in essential and necessary articles of faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them incapable of communion with them.[23]

Hodge rightly comments that the subscription-formula of the Adopting Act compromises between the Dickinson and Thomson positions--the former desiring subscription to 'the essential doctrines of Christianity' and the latter to 'the Westminster confession'--the compromise being the "essential and necessary articles of that Confession."[24]

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[22] Briggs, _Hist._, pp. 217-19, (italics are ours).

[23] _Ibid._, p. 219.

Difficulty quickly presented itself: what was meant by the "necessary and essential articles?" Here Hodge takes an interpretative stand in sympathy with John Thomson and the strict-subscriptionists. In 1730 and again by an Act of the Synod in 1736 the strict-subscriptioners interpreted the Adopting Act as including each and all of the Confessional articles with the exception of certain senses of certain clauses brought out in the list of scruples. Thus Hodge and Thomson conclude that "there is not an 'article or expression' in that formula to which these men did not assent."[25] Hodge adds: "Whether this was right or wrong, liberal or illiberal, it is what the Synod unaminously declared they intended."[26]

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[24] Hodge, Hist. I, 180.

[25] Ibid., p. 183. Briggs(op. cit., p. 265) quotes Thomson (Govt. of the Church of Christ, p. 68) as saying: "I suppose that what our brethren value the printed declaration [Adopting Act] . . . most for, is the too great latitude expressed in it, which fault was amended in the following year, when the latitude was taken away as dangerous."

[26] Ibid., p. 185.

The objection by the Dickinson liberal group was immediate--that the 1736 Act of Synod was illegal and against the very preamble of the Adopting Act--for it was a 'legislative act' and the Adopting Act had ruled out any further 'legislative' power. The Thomson group replied by calling the 'preamble' of the morning session a 'Preliminary Act,' while the afternoon 'scrupling session' was said to constitute the Adopting Act.[27] Actually the answer to the dispute was decided obliquely only after the Church had gone into schism; and it was even then decided unclearly, as would also be the case in the 1788 Constitution. It was only clearly decided with the Auburn Affirmation and the revision in the 1967 Form of Government. Thus the problem of 'legislating' with regard to the essential and necessary articles of faith would keep recurring and keep causing trouble.

Briggs' remarks on the whole dispute (as might be expected) take the opposite side to those of Hodge. Briggs sees the way being prepared for the first schism. The action of the 1736 Synod he describes 'as dangerous to the constitution of the Church.' Thomson and his friends were pushing for an absolutism foreign even to the Mother Presbyterian Churches in Europe. He quotes the remarks of the Tennents about Thomson's proposals: ". . . a legislative authority makes the terms of communion as variable as any weathercock, so that a man is in continual danger of being cast out of communion unless he has a conscience as pliable as wax . . . or can alter his sentiments as fast as the cameleon its colors."[28]

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[27] See F. W. Loetscher, Address on Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Adopting Act, May 24, 1929 (Delivered at the General Assembly), Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1929, 4. Loetscher adopts the terminology distinguishing the "preliminary Act" from the "adopting act."

Before we look into the parallel situation of the abrahamic forces (expressed by the revivalist or 'methodist' movement which has been called the Great Awakening) a final comment is needed on the import of the subscription problem. It entails a much deeper issue than mere external polity. Our comment is simply this: involved in the subscription issue is the theological problem of the church and her authority in interpreting and witnessing to the gospel-revelation in a progressive or developmental proclamation. If the present era of our historical survey shows a strong subscriptionist-party giving excessive authority to the ecclesiastical governing body, the reaction to the opposite extreme of bibliolatry or subjectivism can (and did) lead just as far away from truth by denying a true role to the church and to the confessional-traditioning process within the revelational process. This type of imbalance would be typical of colonial Presbyterian history. Things tended to be black or white. Trinterud sums it up well:

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[28] Briggs, Hist., pp. 265-67.

> The subscriptionist party thought that authoritative and correct creeds would lead men to the truth, in the sense of rational truth about God, and so would lead to correct concepts about God and man. Dickinson, on the other hand, thought of creeds as being fair statements of the general beliefs . . . The only purpose of these was to point beyond themselves to Scripture . . .
>
> The Bible, and the uninterpreted Bible, was the only standard of truth. For Dickinson, truth was that which leads men by a right rule of faith and life to conversion and holy living. Such truth was so apparent in Scripture that not only were binding creeds unnecessary, but . . . generally led to dissensions. Dickinson was thus advancing . . . the old stock arguments that all Reformed theologians had used against the Romanists and Anglicans.[29]

The answer would be that both sides would have to open up to each other, for locked up by themselves in fear of the other they could not grow.

"The Great Awakening": American Revivalism

One of the causative factors of the first schism was the so-called "Great Awakening." It was the first expression of the American Presbyterian "abrahamic forces." Trinterud stands out as the historian of the Great Awakening. He emphasized the unique historical destiny of the American Presbyterian church and claimed the impossibility of interpreting this destiny apart from the Great Awakening. For Trinterud the true pioneers of American Presbyterianism were the group to be known as the

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[29] Trinterud, Hist., p. 31.

"New Side"--including such men as Jonathan Dickinson, the Tennents, Aaron Burr, Samuel Davies and John Witherspoon. It was these men who shaped the new church in the new world. Summarizing his thesis Trinterud writes:

> The greatest contribution of a Church is its own integrity as the Body of Christ in history . . . To live, then, as the Church of some distant homeland, the perpetuator of orders foreign to this new land, the church of a select origin, was to deny that the new nation was the creation of God with a destiny of its own. To be the Body of Christ in history meant to be an American Church, with a divinely directed mission in American history . . . Again, it was in and through the Great Awakening that the vision was caught of making all aspects of the life of the new nation conformable to the reign of God.[30]

This spirit of adaptation and reform--both one with the Church of all the centuries and new as the world within which it was growing--describes with fairness[31] the momentousness of the forces-of-freedom arising within American Protestantism once set free from her European ('State-Religion') origins.

Having seen the dispute over the interpretation of the Adopting Act it is not hard to imagine the mixed reactions that would be evoked when the Great Awakening reached its full force. Its background is complex. At the time of the Adopting Act (1729) when the emigration of Scots and Irish Presbyterians was growing (nearly twelve thousand annually[32]), when the "strict subscriptionists were earnestly striving to keep out the errors of Deism, Socinianism and Semi-Arianism by ecclesiastical fences,"[33] when there "had been a lamentable declension in religion both in Great Britain and in this country,"[34] when early Puritan piety now growing old was being complemented by the German 'pietism'[35] and the beginnings of English Methodism,[36] when "the Presbytery of East Jersey . . . was organized [1733] and later [1738] combined with the Presbytery of Long Island as the Presbytery of New York," and when "the Presbytery of New

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[30] Ibid., p. 307.

[31] Loetscher criticizes Trinterud's interpretation as being more an ideology than a history [Theology Today 6 (Jan. 1950) p. 555].

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[32] Webster, Hist., p. 60.

[33] Briggs, Hist., p. 238.

[34] Hodge, Hist. I, 15.

[35] See Briggs, Hist., p. 239: "Methodism is a revival of Puritanism, it is a genuine development of British Christianity and yet it was influenced . . . by the Pietism of . . . Europe. But Pietism owed its origins to the impulses of Puritanism in the 17th Century. Puritanism gave to the Reformed churches of Holland and Germany the Covenant Theology . . . and that form of vital, experimental and practical religion which became so potent an influence in the Pietism of Spencer, Koelmann, and Zinzendorf. It was an appropriate . . . recompense, that the Continent should receive British Puritanism and transform it into Methodism.

"Methodism in America began in the Dutch Reformed Church, under the influence of Jacob Frelinghuysen . . . educated under Otto Verbrugge and influence by Jacob Koemann, a well known Pietist. He settled at Raritan (1720) and was blessed with repeated revivals." Briggs tells us that Gilbert Tennent settled near him in New Brunswick and was greatly influenced by him.

[36] See ibid. "The Holy club was organized at Oxford in 1729, but it was not until 1738 that the Wesleys were guided by the Moravians into the light and to the adoption of those principles, doctrines, and methods which have been the characteristic features of Methodism."

Brunswick was constructed west of the Raritan river soon to become the center of the Methodist revival,"[37] amid all these beginnings and strivings a new religious force burst forth simultaneously in different parts of Britain and the Colonies. In America the "revivalist forces" were led by William Tennent, Sr. and his sons and followers.

Seeing the great masses of immigrants floundering in their Christianity without ministers,[38] Tennent founded (1735) a crude college for ministerial students which soon received the scornful title of "Log College." "The young men that went forth from this institution," wrote Briggs, "were in hearty sympathy with the principles of Methodism. They complained of the dead orthodoxy of the churches and of the lack of genuine piety in the ministry. They became critical of those who could not follow them."[39] Many ministers they felt "had become abstract and impersonal, the marks of a party rather than the expressions of a living Christian faith."[40] Preaching again became the main instrument of revival, but it was coupled with home-counselling. The 'father' of the new "method" became

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[37] _Ibid_., p. 238.

[38] See Trinterud, _Hist._, p. 75, "The . . . outer frontier . . . with poor means of communication, often without a meeting house or any regular preaching, with no schools, with every opportunity for vice and scarcely none of virtue needed bitterly a ministry of the strongest type.

[39] Briggs, _Hist._, p. 242.

[40] Trinterud, _Hist_., p. 76.

William Tennent. Briggs captures the mood of this new movement in his history. He writes:

> The main problem, as Tennent came to see it, was the "presumptious Security" of his parishioners . . . Their belief in the Bible and orthodox doctrine was to them the same as saving faith. They were saved, according to their concept of orthodoxy, by faith and not by works. . . .
>
> Tennent developed the preaching of "convictions" from the English Puritans. By preaching that no one ever became a Christian without first passing through the terror of realizing that he was not a Christian, Tennent sought to break up the "presumptious Security." He held out the possibility of a true believer's coming to know for himself that he was a Christian.[41]

The anti-revival party, not surprisingly, turned out to be the same as the subscriptionist-party still under the leadership of John Thomson. The real issue lay deeper than the externals of the revival. Hodge poses the real question: "Was this opposition to the revival an opposition to evangelical religion, or merely to extravagance and disorder?"[42] Trinterud asks almost the same questions: "Was the anti-revival party correct in saying that the revival movement was a fanatical thing which struck at all but its own adherents blindly, indiscriminately, and perversely?"[43]

Both historians struggled for objectivity in their answers. Hodge admitted to the "lamentable declension in religion both in Great Britain and in this country, to a very lamentable ignorance of the essentials of true practical religion, . . . and to a general ease and security in sin."[44] But he was also adamant "that no pretense of zeal can authorize the violation of the rules of charity and justice; that violence is no proper remedy, and that adherence to the constitution is the most Christian [and] most effectual means . . ."[45] Trinterud on his part admitted that "turbulent and undisciplined feelings were everywhere being heated up, . . . that a new spiritual life was now pouring out unguided, unrestrained and wholly spontaneous, . . . rapidly becoming individualistic and subjective."[46] "Although the Log College Men . . . quickly grasped the meaning of their situation," he added, ". . . the task was to prove too great for them."[47] And yet we find Briggs quoting Hodge (a good sign of "consensus") in favor of the Great Awakening: "Not withstanding all the disorders there can be no doubt that it was a wonderful display, both of the power and grace of God . . . These men were devout and sober minded men, well versed in the Scriptures and in the history of religion."[48] The main point of agreement between Briggs and Hodge was in the interpretation that the subsequent schism was not a doctrinally rooted split. "There is no evidence," says Briggs, "that the revival in the Presbyterian churches was accompanied with any such disorders and errors of doctrine."[49] Hodge praises the "New Side" theologians: "These men were not errorists or enthusiasts. They were devout and sober minded men, well versed in the Scriptures and in the history of religion."[50] The overall conclusion seems to be that the trouble was more on the polity and freedom side than on the doctrinal side.

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[41] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

[42] Hodge, Hist. II, 219.

[43] Hodge, Hist. II, 15, 22.

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[44] Hodge, Hist. II, 15, 22.

[45] Ibid., p. 251.

[46] Trinterud, Hist., pp. 84, 110.

[47] Ibid., p. 110.

[48] Briggs, Hist., p. 259, citing Hodges, Hist. II, 46. This is perfectly consistent with Hodge's stand throughout (Hist., II, 251) that "the great schism [a greater one was to come after Hodge's book came out] was not the result of conflicting views, either as to doctrine or church government. It was the result of alienation of feeling produced by the controversies relating to the revival . . ."

Concerning this issue Hodge concluded: "It appears . . . that the opposition to the revival was an opposition to the extravagance and not to evangelical religion."[51] Briggs concluded the opposite: "the 'old side' show throughout that they were opposed to the revival itself, and the Methodist movement in general."[52] Trinterud sided with Briggs and compared the situation of the Revivalists with that of the early Reformers: "Each of these . . . faced a corrupt, well-intrenched old order which controlled the ecclesiastical organization . . . Consequently each found growing up within its own bosom a serious sectarian problem. . ."[53]

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Hodge, Hist. II, 223.

[51] Ibid., p. 226.

[52] Briggs, Hist., p. 259, to which Briggs adds (ibid.): "There was the less excuse for their continued opposition in view of the fact that the leaders of American Methodism promptly opposed the enthusiasts who brought disgrace on the genuine work of Revival. Jonathan Dickinson, Gilbert Tennent, and Jonathan Edwards wrote discriminating tracts upon the subject, which will remain for all time as the source of information with reference to the true spirit and character of American Methodism."

Although doctrinal differences were denied, later history would show how intimately related the condition of freedom was to doctrinal or theological growth. In fact the implicit issue was already theological growth--if only of an ecclesiology allowing for further doctrinal growth. This deeper issue would involve in its own history the implicit theologies of each of our three historians of colonial Presbyterianism. The sign-posts are already present in their historical interpretations.

The Schism

The ecclesiastical-subscription element now re-enters our analysis. The Adopting Act was vague in many aspects that later history would have to clarify. Beside the fundamental dispute about 'legislative power' it was inevitable that another dispute would come about concerning the vagueness of the judiciary power--specifically concerning the consignment of this power "to the Presbytery or Synod." (By the time of the Constitution this would also entail the General Assembly.) The inevitable happened and the dispute began.

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[53] Trinterud, Hist., p. 110, n. 2.

At the Synod of 1738 John Thomson began the battle on both the polity and "revival" fronts by proposing "that every student who has not studied in the New England, or European colleges shall apply himself to this Synod [for examination] . . ."[54] The proposal was approved by a large majority. The following year brought in a paper of objections from the New Brunswick Presbytery and proposed a compromise plan according to which there was added to the original plan: "The Synod agree . . . [that] if they find him qualified, they shall give him a certificate, which shall be received . . . as equivalent to a diploma or certificate from the college."[55] Although a core of the "Log College" men still protested the compromise Act "was approved *nemine contra dicente*."[56] Before the Synod closed however the Presbytery of New Brunswick had second thoughts and announced they would disregard the Act for neglecting to safeguard the rights of the Presbyteries. The Synod declared this proceedure out of order. Briggs suggests that the issue " . . . really involved a deeper struggle as to the authority of the Synod, and also different interpretations of the Adopting Act. . . ."[57] In an *Apology* written during the ensuing year the Tennents claimed that the Synod could not make new laws[58]--again reawakening the fundamental issue of 1729.

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[54] Briggs, *Hist*., p. 242.

[55] *Ibid*., pp. 243-44, citing from *The Records* (1739), p. 146.

[56] *Ibid*., p. 244.

[57] *Ibid*., pp. 245-46.

At this point things began to happen rapidly. The forces for revival persisted and grew stronger. The soon famous Methodist preacher, George Whitefield, appeared from England for the second time and as a result of his preaching"drew many members of the New York Presbytery closer to the Tennents."[59] On May 5, 1740 Jonathan Dickinson, who on the matter of the revival had remained moderate, preached a sermon on "The Witness of the Spirit" in which he took the side of the revival forces.[60] On May 28 the whole Synod met at Philadelphia and the issue of legislative and judicial power was the central issue. The "Log College" school contended legislative power never belonged to the Church and that there was no biblical warrant for it.[61] Dickinson proposed arbitration by Scotland, Ireland, London or Boston. Gillespie proposed "that each presbytery be allowed to ordain men, but that the synod should be allowed to check over each new minister's examinations."[62] Gilbert Tennent however " . . . stuck hard by the position which was to become normative for American Presbyterianism in contrast to Scottish . . . , namely that the Presbytery and not the higher judicature was the fundamental unit of Church organization."[63] The Synod voted and the majority decided the Act of 1739 should stand. The following year's Synod (May 27, 1741) saw complete victory-amid-chaos for John Thomson's stricter view that only by strengthening the authority of the Church's government could order be restored. Thomson's "Protestation" demanded the complete capitulation of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, or schism. And so the New Brunswick brethren said 'we will not sit' while the other side answered 'you have no right to sit in synod.' Hodge describes the chaos: " . . . not even the forms of an ecclesiastical, much less of a judicial proceeding, were observed at this crisis. There was no motion, no vote, not even a presiding officer in the chair. It was a disorderly rupture."[64]

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[58] *Ibid.*, p. 245.

[59] Trinterud, *Hist.*, p. 94.

[60] See *ibid.*, Tennent comments on this latter event: " . . . the die had been cast, and the future character of American Presbyterianism had been determined."

[61] See *ibid.*, p. 95.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Conclusions on the first schism are varied. Trinterud concludes that the main issue was the revival. He claims that there is some evidence that the schism was deliberately engineered by Thomson and his followers--not over dogma or Church government but "because of a determined . . . endeavor to awaken the Presbyterian Church from a state of great declension in vital piety."[65] Briggs' conclusion is equally pro-New Side:

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[63] Ibid., p. 98.

[64] Hodge, Hist. II, 158-59.

[65] Trinterud, Hist., p. 107-08.

"Thus a mere fragment of the Synod presumed to alter the fundamental law of the Church, make strict subscription obligatory upon all ministers and elders; and discard the breadth and liberty of the original Adopting Act."[66] Hodge concludes in terms of law and order. He cites Thomson's treatise on the Government of the Church as authorizing church officers both to teach and to rule. Accordingly "they have authority to explain these doctrines and agree about the meaning of Scripture as to doctrinals . . . to apply these laws and rules to particular cases . . . because they contain no new matter but what is supposed to be contained in the divine law . . ."[67] From this Hodge draws his own conclusion with which he said both parties agreed. "All power to make new laws on religious matters," Hodge writes, "was disclaimed, but the authority to make rules to carry into effect the general principles contained in the Word of God, was asserted."[68] Briggs concurs with Hodge and admits that the New Brunswick interpretation of the Adopting Act was too loose regarding law-making. "It certainly did not mean," states Briggs, " . . . that the Synod could take no action against the conscience of a majority of a lower Court, but . . . that the Synod could not impose such acts against conscientious scruples."[69]

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[66] Briggs, Hist., p. 267.

[67] Hodge, Hist. II, 243-45, citing Thomson, Government of the Church, p. 60-62 (Italics ours).

[68] Ibid.

[69] Briggs, Hist., p. 247.

These two passages show that the Presbyterian polity problem involved the distinction between (1) disciplinary government for which the structure of government must be carefully spelled out, and (2) doctrinal interpretation, for which the theology of doctrinal development as well as the theology of the church's role in it needed to be more clearly articulated. Concerning the former the American Presbyterian problem was caught in a kind of vagueness for which its constitutional law (1788) would eventually provide at least a working solution. With regard to the second the time was hardly ripe for proposing the solution; the problem had not yet been clearly seen. It had to await the next century and the advent of Charles Darwin. The practical situation however was perfectly clear. The new Church was in schism and the two factions needed time to heal.

Toward Reunion

Scarcely had the centrifugal forces of tension split the church when the centripetal forces of community and unification were at work. The first step toward reunification was actually a further split--the polarizing of the initial schism. It happened when the New York Presbytery separated from the old Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia and joined with the schismatic New Brunswick Presbytery to form the new Synod of New York.

This occurred at the Synod of 1745 when, after a proposal by Jonathan Dickinson to form a Committee to 'remove the differences' was declined by the Presbytery of New York, it was proposed by the latter that with mutual agreement another Synod be formed such that "there may be a foundation for the two Synods to consult and act in mutual concert with one another hereafter, and maintain love and brotherly kindness with each other."[70] To this the Synod of Philadelphia responded: "though we judge they have no just ground to withdraw from us, yet seeing they desire to do this in the most friendly manner, we declare, if any of them do so, we shall endeavour to maintain charitable and Christian affections toward them."[71]

Jonathan Dickinson of Elizabethtown was chosen moderator of the new Synod. The New Brunswick party made a virtual confession of their errors, cheerfully surrendering to the New York brethren what the authority of the Philadelphia Synod could not extort. Together with their new allies they now "extended the olive branch" to their former enemies. The 'terms-of-membership' in the New York Synod reflect the master work of Dickinson: (1) a return to the Adopting Act as agreed to in 1729; (2) disciplinary matters to be decided by majority vote of the entire Synod; (3) no special educational requirements for the Log College; and (4) a friendly correspondence with the Synod of Philadelphia is to be maintained.[72] Trinterud comments: "With the founding of the Synod of New York, the destiny of American Presbyterianism was determined, and the creation of a new order became possible."[73]

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[70] Ibid., p. 269.

[71] Ibid.

One of the problems of reunion was certainly to be the college or 'seminary' issue. It was answered in 1747 when the College of New Jersey was established at Elizabeth to succeed the old Log College with Jonathan Dickinson as its first president. Upon his death less than a year later the College moved to Newark. There it stayed for eight years before making its final home in Princeton where it would play a vital part in American Presbyterian history. The list of its first Presidents speaks for itself. They were all ministers from the new Synod of New York: Dickinson was followed in order by Aaron Burr, Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Davies, Samuel Finley, and John Blair. In 1768 John Witherspoon came from Scotland. "All these years," writes Nichols, " the College was sending men of the spirit of the revival into the ministry of the Synod."[74] Through the college there grew up close relations between the Synod and the New England Churches[75] with an interchange of Synod people and Yale people on the undergraduate as well as the theology-school-level. "These reciprocal intellectual ties," notes Nichols, "had important effect in years to come on Congregational-Presbyterian relations."[76] The history of Princeton will continue to reflect and form the history of American Presbyterianism.

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[72] Ibid., p. 270.

[73] Trinterud, Hist., p. 121. This was echoed by Nichols in his history (op. cit., 44): "It was a new day in American Presbyterianism when the Synod of New York with this spirit was founded."

[74] Nichols, Hist., p. 59.

[75] See ibid.

The Reunion of 1758

The continuous efforts of Jonathan Dickinson for reunion were thwarted by his death (1747). In 1749 however his Synod proposed to the Philadelphia Synod "that all our former differences be buried in perpetual oblivion and that both Synods be united into one."[77] Philadelphia rejected the proposal and it was evident that a longer "cooling off" period was needed. There was no doubt however that the Synod of Philadelphia was hurting from the schism while the Synod of New York was thriving. "The Synod of New York was the strongest Church in the middle colonies," writes Trinterud, "possessed of a thriving college and numerous classical schools giving back to it an ever-increasing number of zealous pioneer ministers."[78] Neither Trinterud nor Briggs have a kind word for the Old Side progress during the schism. "For the Old Side," Trinterud notes, "the source and fountain of all true Presbyterianism lay 'at home' across the sea. They denied to the American Church the right to a genius and character of its own."[79] "On the one [New] side," compares Briggs, "were Puritan vital piety and Methodist aggressive evangelization; on the other [Old], the formalism of conformity to rigid doctrine and of inefficiency in traditional methods of work . . ."[80] "While the New Side," he adds, "has increased to fourfold their numbers and influence; the old side had found it exceedingly difficult to secure ministers who would submit to their rigid subscription . . ."[81]

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[76] Ibid. Nichols tells us (ibid., 60) that ". . . three quarters of the strength of the church came from the Synod of New York. Of the ninety-six ministers in 1758, seventy-three were of New York. Twenty-eight were graduates of Yale and twenty of the College of New Jersey."

[77] Ibid., p. 60, citing Records of the Presbyterian Church 1749, p. 238.

Three issues had to be met before reunion. Presupposing that the "Log College" issue was settled by the founding of the College of New Jersey this left (1) the revival, (2) disciplinary proceedure, specifically the 1741 Act of Excision, and (3) the subscription formula. The Plan of Reunion combining the two Synods (May 22, 1758) adjusted the three basic issues to the mutual satisfaction of both Old and New Sides. Concerning the revival it was agreed that there were times when its signs are "to be acknowledged as a gracious work of God" as well as times when "such persons are under a dangerous delusion."[82] The Act of Excision of 1741 was removed by the Philadelphis Synod's declaration that "they never judicially adopted the said protestation, nor do account it a Synodical act, but as the act of those only who subscribed it."[83] The general disciplinary rule indirectly forbade excision providing for 'peaceable withdrawal' in times of scruple of conscience--"provided always that this shall be understood to extend only to such determinations as the body shall judge indispensable in doctrine and Presbyterian government."[84] On this issue Briggs comments: "the phrase 'indispensable in doctrine' is only a synonym of the 'essential and necessary articles' and 'agreeable in substance to the Word of God' of the Adopting Act of 1729."[85] Finally the all important subscription issue was harmonized in the lead article of the Plan for Reunion. According to this Plan it was agreed that:

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[78] Trinterud, Hist., p. 134.

[79] Ibid., p. 164.

[80] Briggs, Hist., p. 272.

[81] Ibid., p. 317.

> Both Synods having always approved and received the Westminster Confession of Faith . . . as an orthodox and excellent system of Christian doctrine, founded on the Word of God, we do still receive the same as the confession of our faith, and also adhere to the plan of worship, government, and discipline contained in the Westminster Directory, strictly enjoining it on all our members and pro-

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[82] From Art. viii of the Plan of Union, Records 1758, p. 287, cited in Briggs, ibid., p. 318.

[83] Ibid., citing from Art. IV of the Plan of Union.

[84] Ibid., p. 319 (Italics ours). [85] Ibid.

> bationers for the ministry, that they preach and teach according to the form of sound words in said Confession . . . , and avoid and oppose all errors contrary thereto."[86]

Briggs again compares the Plan of Reunion to the formula of the Adopting Act noting that the reunited Church "fell back upon the Adopting Act of 1729 and declined to follow the stricter views of subscription of the Synod of Philadelphia in the Declaratory Act of 1736."[87] Specifically he points out that:

> The emphasized phrase "orthodox and excellent system of Christian doctrine" is only the language of the Adopting Act of 1729 "as being in all the essential and necessary articles good forms of sound words, and systems of Christian doctrine" in slightly different language. The system contained in the Westminster Standards embraced only what was "indispensable in doctrine or Presbyterian government," that which was "essential and necessary" . . .[88]

In the Reunion Plan several vague areas persisted that in future history would painfully demand even further clarification. The first concerned the disciplinary-judiciary power--'to extend only to such determinations as the body shall judge.' At the Reunion this "body" stood for the combined Synod and as such it seemed to remove the previous option of the Adopting Act ('the Synod OR Presbytery') and center the power in the Synod--'from the top down.' This question would be resolved in the Constitution of 1788. But we have already seen that "its tension" would be felt even in the twentieth-century in the Auburn Affirmation dispute. The second issue and second 'tension-to-be' would still arise from the subscriptional issue. Granting Briggs' equation between 'indispensable doctrine' and 'essential and necessary articles' the 1758 Plan of Reunion continued to speak of 'strictly enjoining' the Westminster Standards. The tension between these two would soon reappear. What precisely was to be enjoined?--and how strictly?

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., p. 320.

[88] Ibid.

Post-Reunion: Immigration and Conservatism

Soon after the Reunion "the second large wave of Scotch-Irish immigrants came in . . . up until the outbreak of the Revolutionary War."[89] "They contributed," according to Trinterud, "little of positive nature, [but] in another way their influence was enormous."[90] The Synod clergy--New Side, Old Side, New England, and Scotch-Irish--pushed westward and southward in an all out missionary drive. The result according to Trinterud was to radically alter the character of the Presbyterian Church and to fix the destiny of the New England group. "By the close of the Revolutionary War," Trinterud writes,

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[89] Trinterud, Hist., p. 226.

[90] Ibid.

"there were . . . hundreds of churches among these Scotch-Irish in the frontiers. As their many sons turned toward the ministry there was not one school . . . staffed by New England trained men or men sympathetic to New England views . . . and the future of the Church belonged to the descendents of the Scotch-Irish."[91] In this situation the former New Side and Old Side distinctions gradually dwindled away and before many years passed a Scotch-Irish party arose within the Church in whose eyes the New England group were outsiders. The remnants of the Old Side now came to play a greater part in the leadership of the Church. The trend of colonial American Presbyterianism changed but whether it was the final death-knell to the New England 'broad-church' spirit would depend on one's chronological viewpoint. Trinterud himself seems to have brightened the picture when twenty years were added to his historical perspective.[92] All agreed at any

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[91] Ibid., p. 226, pp. 263-64.

[92] Trinterud wrote his history in 1949 when the trend of American Presbyterianism, or for that matter of American Christian Theology, was merely beginning to undergo a new rennaissance. In his introductory article for the Proposal for the Confession of 1967 Trinterud does adopt a brighter stand for the future (art. cit., 17-18): "It did not seem possible for these American churches to re-examine Scripture in order to do, by the Holy Spirit's guidance, what the Protestant reformers had done, namely, to confess anew and afresh the Christian faith with direct reference to the immediate situation. The Westminster documents had come to have the character of timeless truth rather than the truth for the times . . .

[But] the original Reformed and Presbyterian conviction that the church was obligated to confess its faith in concrete to the need for a transculturalization process to bring the theological-spiritual level of the immigrating masses up to the level of their predecessors. This process would take time--almost two hundred more years!

Another factor that complicated the post-Reunion scene was that of theological-rationalism "which pervaded the theology of both the conservative and the more liberal groups in the Church, and which provided the bridge by which many former New Side men crossed over to the conservative side."[93] There was actually a dearth of theological reflection and defensive scholastic conservatism ('preservatism') was to prevail among the Confessional churches. The eighteenth century wasn't capable of anticipating Darwin and so the theological picture as well as any immediate forecast remained one of conservatism. Trinterud describes the scene accurately:

> The New Side had broken somewhat with the current static theology, but had been unable to transcend and go beyond it. For a time the Edwardian theology had seemed to provide a new way, but it had proved abortive in Presbyterianism. The New Side, both its Log College wing and its New England wing, had been unable to break out of

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specific terms in the immediate situation did not wholly die out . . .

By the close of World War II most Presbyterian and Reformed churches . . . realized that the responsibility for confessing the faith now, . . . had once more to be taken up. New confessional documents . . . began to appear . . ."

[93] Trinterud, Hist. p. 264.

> the rationalistic method and to achieve a Biblically based theology. Their differences with the Old Side Conservatism became more and more a matter of emphasis and of personal conscience, as the impact of the Great Awakening grew fainter with the lapse of time.
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> It was out of this conservative reaction that the Old School Presbyterianism of the early nineteenth century grew. Sensing . . . it was essentially a reaction, it took as one of its major tasks the elimination of all the older liberalizing influences in the Church . . . Thus the Church, which owed its very life, purity, and strength to the stress upon the free, spontaneous, though adequately responsible, Christian life born out of the New Side in the Great Awakening, was taught to abhor the very springs of its greatness.[94]

The Constitution and First General Assembly

The American Presbyterian Church continued to grow. Soon it spread over so large a territory that the annual Synod became an impossibility for many of the ministers. Thus "a system of representation was rendered necessary."[95] Since it was "preferred to use the Synod as a larger Presbytery in which all the ministers residing in a section of the country might assemble, . . . it was decided to organize a representative General Assembly."[96] John Witherspoon who had arrived from Scotland in 1768 to take over the presidency of the New Jersey College was very influential in drawing up this constitution.

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Briggs, Hist., p. 362.

[96] Ibid., see Trinterud, op. cit., p. 296: ". . . representation [would be] based upon the numerical strength of each presbytery, [and thus] a system of checks and balances was . . . provided."

He had opposed the conservatives in Scotland. In America however he couldn't be described as "in total agreement with the New Side contingent, since he was both suspicious of and indifferent toward the 'new divinity' . . ."[97] He was a good representative of the 'mixed' Presbyterianism of the time and tended "towards the methods of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland [though not of the strictest type]."[98] A sufficient number of American ministers however continued to express disfavor with "foreign influence in the government of the Church, such that it became indispensable that the Synod should revise the Westminster Symbols."[99] And so the new Form of Government became an essentially American document.[100] Unlike the Scottish General Assembly which was supreme in authority the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States left the ultimate power in the hands of the presbyteries. To change the law (i.e., the Constitution) would require the vote of two-thirds of the Presbyteries:

> Resolved . . . that the Form of Government and Discipline and the Confession of Faith, as now ratified, is to continue to be our constitution and the confession of our faith . . . , unless two thirds of the Presbyteries under the care of the General Assembly shall

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[97] Lake, Hist., p. 42.

[98] Briggs, Hist., p. 362 [brackets ours].

[99] Ibid., p. 364.

[100] See Trinterud, Hist., p. 298.

> propose alterations or ammendments and such . . . shall be agreed to and enacted by the General Assembly.[101]

It was important that the new Form of Government speak to the issues of the Plan of Reunion and Adopting Act.[102] It did this while making judicious use of the Scottish Form of Government. The following preliminary principles set forth the basis upon which the Synod had proceeded to draw up the new Constitution. Basically they still guide the Presbyterian Church in the United States:

> "I. That 'God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrine and commandments of men . . .' Therefore, they consider the rights of private judgment, in . . . religion, as . . . inalienable . . .
>
> "II. That, in perfect consistency with the above . . . , every Christian Church . . . [is] entitled to declare the terms of admission into their communion, and the qualifications of their ministers and members, as well as the whole system of the internal government which Christ hath appointed: that in the exercise of this right, they may, not withstanding, err, . . . either too lax or too narrow: yet, even in this case, they do not encroach upon the rights of others, but only make an improper use of their own.
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> "III. That our Saviour . . . hath appointed officers . . . also to exercise discipline . . .

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[101] Armstrong, Loetscher et. al., Hist., p. 96.

[102] Cf. ibid., p. 95: "The Synod took into consideration the last paragraph of the twentieth chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the third paragraph of the twenty-third chapter, and having made some alterations, agreed that the said paragraphs, as now altered, be printed for consideration, together with the draught of a plan of government and discipline."

> observing in all cases, the rules contained in the word of God.
>
> "IV. That truth is in order to goodness . . . otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover truth, or to embrace it.
>
> "V. That, while . . . they think it necessary to make an effectual provision, that all who are admitted as teachers, be sound in faith; they also believe that there are truths and forms . . . [in] which men . . . may differ . . . [and should] exercise mutual forbearance . . .
>
> "VII. That all church power . . . is only ministerial and declarative: that is to say that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws, to bind consciences, in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be found upon the revealed will of God: Now though it will easily be admitted, that all Synods and Councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity; yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws, than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the Gospel; although this right, as necessity required in the present state, be lodged with fallible men."[103]

With regard to article II it was determined that: "the rule of licensure and ordination was vested in the presbyteries, contrary to Scottish law, but in conformity with the New Side's policy earlier in the century . . ."[104] And with regard to II and V: "the Synod adopted the Constitution in the sense of the original Adopting Act of 1729 and the terms of the Reunion of 1758."[105] This Briggs says is clear from the terms of subscription: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the confession of faith of this church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?"[106] The 'system of doctrine' Briggs understands as implying only a general approval of '_Westminster's_ system of doctrine' according to its 'essential and necessary articles.'

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[103] Briggs, Hist., pp. 367-69.

[104] Trinterud, Hist., p. 300.

[105] Briggs, Hist., p. 370.

The Constitution therefore did clarify _some_ of the fundamental vagueness of the Adopting Act and of the 1758 Plan of Reunion. It centered the ultimate power in the Presbyteries as opposed to the Synods and now the General Assembly. With regard to the latitude of subscription however, even if we grant Briggs' new equation of 'the system of doctrine' with 'the essential and necessary articles of Westminster,' the vagueness seemed to be even increased. A new variable was now brought in--the 'system of doctrine taught _in the Holy Scripture._' Certainly this could be wide open for dispute (as the _Auburn Affirmation_ eventually confirmed). As one example of the confusion Hodge was still able to maintain his _strict views_ on subscription and constitution-wise it is difficult to prove that he is wrong. Thus Hodge was able to ask:

> Who ever heard of adopting a constitution _for substance_? All are bound to observe it _in all_ its parts. If then the Westminster Confession is a part of our constitution, we are bound by it or rightfully to get it altered. As containing the system of doctrines taught in the Word of God he

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[106] _Ibid_.

> assents . . . to the whole concatenated statement of doctrines contained in the Confession. This, right or wrong, is the constitutional and fundamental principle of our ecclesiastical compact.[107]

In answer to Hodge one could say that, if his interpretation were the intention of the Constitution-making body, then the formula they chose to say-it-with was a poor representation of their intention.

The real stumbling block lay in the VII principle. There remained a definite vagueness as to the meaning of "legislative" power as opposed to "ministerial" and "declarative" power. Presumably legislative power is a power which is capable of binding conscience; but if so, is it with regard to discipline and doctrine or merely with regard to discipline? If only the latter then the Church can in no way authoritatively determine, interpret, or develop the revelational truth. Involved here then is the whole authority problem. The matter is essentially vague. Hodge summarizes one cause of confusion. He distinguishes between two types of law, one pertaining to matters of faith and morals, the other to matters of government and discipline. With regard to the latter the church does have power to "legislate." He cites the Adopting Act itself as an example. Such decisions are binding upon all as long as not inconsistent with the word of God or some previous constitutional act. It is the former "legislative power" (about faith and morals) that was meant by the Adopting Act when it disclaimed any legislative power in the church.[108] Hodge's interpretation of "legislative power" would turn out to be the correct one--but it would take another schism to clarify the issue.

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[107] Hodge, Hist. I, 204, 218.

THE SECOND OR "GREAT" SCHISM

The Forces at Large

As we begin the nineteenth century American Presbyterianism's mosaic-abrahamic tension was itself engulfed in Christianity's larger field of force. Both the internal and the external forces caused centripetal-centrifugal oscillations. The internal Presbyterian tension expressed itself between the so-called Old School-New School rivalry which was the new version of the Old Side-New Side struggle. The tension with Christianity at large expressed itself in terms of denominationalism as opposed to a "broad-churchism" or "comprehensionism." The task was to maintain the balance of both sets of forces. Cutting across them was the unique Presbyterian polity-doctrine duality and at their juncture-point was the subscription problem--and so the authority problem. Since the time for real doctrinal revision and development had not yet come the polity side of the subscription controversy was to continue to bear the brunt of the struggle.

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[108] See ibid., pp. 107-08, 175.

Denominationalism versus Ecumenism

Looking first at the broader Christian involvement of the Presbyterian Church we see that the post-revolutionary-war territorial expansion demanded an equal missionary expansion. This was to take place in a uniquely American ('pluralistic-democratic') way. The expansionist and intercooperative missionary mood was to express itself in a Plan of Union with the New England Congregationalist missionaries. It was like an 'apostolic' Great-Awakening and the reactions of some churchmen to it would be the same as to the first 'awakening.' Trinterud gives this comparison his implicit backing and even connects them. "During the Great Awakening," he writes, "the hard, narrow spirit of denominationalism which most of the colonial immigrants had brought with them was cracked in large sections of the Presbyterian Church."[109] Briggs cites the example of a Dutch Reformed Pastor who in 1744 "laid a letter before us from the deputies of North and South Holland wherein they desire whether the Dutch churches may be joined in communion with said Synod . . ."[110] Since the New

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[109] Trinterud, Hist., p. 131.

[110] Briggs, Hist., pp. 284-88.

Side was then excluded the proposal was easily defeated. In fairness to those fearing excessive breadth at the expense of denominational-depth we cite one of their spokesman James Wood (a member of the Old School). He makes the good point that denominations are not necessarily bad and that unity does not demand uniformity. "It should be regarded an object of less importance to secure an organic union . . .," Wood says, "than to see them all faithfully and zealously performing the work of the Lord . . . while towards each other they keep 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'"[111] Thus even Briggs shifted his discernment of the ecumenical opportunity of colonial Presbyterianism. "Such a supremacy of Presbyterianism in America," he wrote, "might have involved a premature struggle with the English crown; it would have prevented the establishment of those principles of liberty and equality which are now the boast of the American Republic."[112] In the tension between denominationalism and ecumenism 'the ideal' is that of dynamic-timely-balance: a balance that is not static but determined to risk and adapt after making a serious and labored effort to discern.

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[111] James Wood, Old and New Theology: Or, The Doctrinal Differences Which Have Agitated and Divided the Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication), 1855 (new and enlarged), p. 262.

[112] Briggs, Hist. pp. 288-89.

The 1801 Plan of Union

As the nineteenth century gave expression to the new surge of ecumenism the close alliance between ecumenism and revivalism became more evident. The revivalistic approach was most suitable to missionary preaching--where very occasional "camp meetings"[113] substituted for the absence of regularly constituted churches with their own ministers. The ecumenism became necessary because of the dearth of ministers. This brought the Congregational and Presbyterian missionary effort in Ohio and western New York "to take steps to eliminate wasteful overlapping--a cooperative scheme far in advance of its times . . ."[114] This "Plan of Union" set the tone and standard for missionary cooperation for a half-century between Presbyterians and Congregationalists. The people themselves did not really care which denomination. They wanted a Christian church, a minister, and the Word of God.

In 1807 the Synod of Albany received an overture from the Congregationalist Middle Association not merely for cooperation but for "some form of Union and correspondence." In response the Synod made a momentous proposal:

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[113] Thus Armstrong, op. cit., p. 110, writes: "It has been said that the organization of the Western Missionary Society by the Synod of Pittsburgh in 1802 'began a new era in the missionary life of the Church.' Missions were no longer a voluntary project but the main business of the Church . . ." And again (ibid., p. 111): "Beginning about 1797 and continuing for many years, the frontier churches of Kentucky and Tennessee were the scene of a spectacular revival of religion. Thousands of people gathered for 'camp meetings'."

[114] Ibid., p. 102.

> We most cordially invite you to become a constituent part of our body, by assuming the characteristic and scriptural name of presbytery, adopt our standards of doctrine and government, and sit and vote with us, in all the great and interesting concerns of the church. Deeming the name, however, far less important than the thing, although of consequence to uniformity in the same body; yet should you be solicitous to retain yours, it will not be considered, on our part, a bar to such a union. Nor do we confine our invitation to you as ministers, but we extend it also to delegates from your churches, whom we are willing to receive as substantially the same with our ruling elders. Should the churches . . . prefer their present mode of Congregational government, we assure them of our utmost cheerfulness in leaving them undistrubed, unless they shall choose to alter it themselves.[115]

The General Assembly of 1808 approved the plan for the Presbyterian side and a month later the Middle Association "voted unaminously that this body do accede to the plan retaining our present name and mode of Congregational Government."[116] Thus began the "Presby-gational" churches. "Within thirty years," Nichols tells us, "a hundred and fifty Congregational churches entered presbyteries."[117]

After the War of 1812 in the era that political history called 'the Era of Good Feelings' the cooperative missionary efforts increased. 'Calvinist-Baptists' and Methodists were great missionaries. But neither of them were up to the organized missiology or the seminary educational system of the Presbyterian and Congregationalist Churches. In 1811 the answer of the General Assembly to the tendency _to relax_ educational requirements for the ministry was to go the opposite way and to establish Princeton Seminary. In 1816 to meet the spiritual needs of the West it created the Board of Missions with authority to extend the work of the Church.[118] In 1818 the Presbyterian Education Society, organized in New York, was ready to help all qualified candidates regardless of their denomination and in 1819 the General Assembly established a general Board of Education.[119]

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[115] J. Q. Adams (ed.), "Records of the Middle Association . . . 1806-10," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XI, 25-27, cited in Nichols, Hist., p. 84.

[116] Ibid., pp. 21-22 (Nichols, ibid., p. 85).

[117] Nichols, ibid., p. 86.

General Causes of Schism

The co-operative and outgoing-centrifugal spirit of the first quarter of the nineteenth century especially by the old New York Synod soon gave birth to a strong reaction on the part of the denominationalistic segment of Presbyterians (again centered in the old Philadelphia Synod). By 1831 two distinct parties were recognizable in the General Assembly known as the Old School and New School parties. By 1837 the Presbyterian

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[118] See Armstrong _et al_, op. cit., p. 123.

[119] See _ibid_., pp. 125-26.

Church would enter its second schism which this time would last for thirty-two years. The causes are complex, but might be gathered under the rubrics of polity and doctrine--with the slavery issue finally unsettling the balance.

On the polity side "the Plan of Union and Accommodation Plans occasioned some distinctive features. In some cases synods recognized that they had no jurisdiction with such churches."[120] On the doctrinal side of the Union especially in New York Presbyterianism "there was the custom of having every member adopt a congregational 'covenant' usually including a doctrinal statement . . ."[121] Thus a key Reform principle was at stake. New York Presbyterians were accustomed to attempt to restate the faith, in comparison to churches that never used anything but the Westminster standards.[122] Amid the growing success of the innovating Church jealousy and fear awakened particularly in the Philadelphia area which had been accustomed to lead the church.[123] And a familiar cry arose for a more rigorous and authoritarian enforcement of both doctrine and church order. Presbyterian church order was insisted upon *jure divino* by some. In response to the missionary expansion and the tremendous success of the new "Presbygational" boards the Old School labored desperately to breathe life into the ineffective denominational Boards of Missions and Education, arguing that church extension should be carried on only under ecclesiastical control and under strict application of confessional standards. The inevitable outcome was that the missionaries of the two organizations were forced into competition.[124]

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[120] Nichols, *Hist*., p. 113.

[121] *Ibid*., p. 114.

[122] See *ibid*.

[123] See *ibid*., p. 115.

Battle lines were again being drawn. One of the major bastions for the Old School would be Princeton Seminary for which the elder Nichols had few kind words. "This type of theological traditionalism," he wrote, "was illustrated by the pledge required of Princeton Seminary professors each of whom promised he would not 'inculcate, teach, or insinuate anything which shall appear to contradict anything taught in said Confession of Faith or Catechisms.'"[125] All the earlier subscription controversies came to the fore again. "While many Pennsylvania presbyteries exacted unqualified subscription to the Standards," reports Nichols, "New England and Western Reserve generally did not do so. The subscription in Connecticut and New York was generally in the form of the Adopting Act."[126] Another bitterly argued issue concerned the examination of transfer ministers from other Presbyteries or from Congregational bodies. Beyond these polity problems doctrinal issues were coming more and more to the forefront. They were really implicit in the subscription controversy. In fact the very conception of "subscription" was being subjected to theological or doctrinal reflection. This was recognized by Dr. Nichols who noted that ". . . Edwardean and Hopkinsian peculiarities were understood in New York as minor variations within the general Calvinist system of the Westminster Standards, and thus as compatible with a sincere subscription to the latter."[127] In the long run this conception of subscription was to be their most important and controversial theological position.

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[124] See *ibid.*, p. 116.

[125] *Ibid*.

[126] *Ibid*., p. 119.

The Doctrinal Issue and Schism

The earlier New York Synod "New-Side" connections with New England theology were even heightened in the "New School" era (1830-1870). The Congregational seminary at Andover sent nearly half its graduates into the Presbyterian Church. The New England Colleges (Amherst, Williams, Dartmouth, Middlebury, and Yale) sent even more. The key upstate New York Colleges for Presbyterians, Union and Hamilton, derived most of their faculties from New England. The doctrinal climate is described by Nichols:

> These various institutions taught, on the whole, one or another variety of the revivalist Calvinist traditions began by Jonathan Edwards in the Great Awakening . . . loosely labeled the "New England

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[127] *Ibid*., p. 111.

> theology" or "Hopkinsianism" from the author of the first systematics. All were predestinarian Calvinists, but the Hopkinsians . . . rejected the legal metaphors explaining the solidarity of sinners with Adam whose guilt was "imputed" to his descendants. They made a distinction between the moral and physical inability of fallen man to obey God, holding that depravity was a matter of the will, and that the sinner had the physical capacity to do good, if only he could will to do so. They denied that the scope of Christ's atoning work was limited to the elect in intention . . . Several of these distinctive views were especially suited to preaching revivals, which all regarded as desirable.[128]

After 1825 the left-wing fringe of the New England theology gave birth to the "New Haven theology" deriving from Nathaniel Taylor a revivalist pastor at the Center Church in New Haven and from the new Yale Divinity School. Taylor was determined to establish real freedom and responsibility in man and to do away with the charges of "fatalism" against Calvinistic theology. He denied the conventional explanation of "original sin" and limited the proper notion of sin only to deliberate acts of the will. The infant could not be a sinner until his first moral act. And with all this Taylor had still subscribed to the Westminster doctrines according to the Saybrook platform. "Hopkinsians were as scandalized as covenant theologians " comments Nichols. "A Hartford group struck an alliance with the covenant theologians at Princeton to fight the 'New Divinity.' Taylor was the archheretic and 'Taylorism' was the accusation leveled against many Presbyterians of New England antecedents."[129] The death struggle would take place in this doctrinal arena with the conservative, "no-development" party finally being the one to break away and almost dissolve. It is this party we now see in the making one hundred years beforehand. At this point Loetscher enters upon the scene as the historian of the "broadening Church." His overall reflection on the "Old" versus "New" School theologies presents a summary picture:

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[128] *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

> Following Edwards, the New England Theology inclined toward philosophic idealism, whereas the Old School Presbyterians, following John Witherspoon and the Princeton lead, inclined toward philosophic realism. The difference was significant, for the dogmatic and literalistic Scottish "common-sense" type of realism was much less inclined to speculation and innovation than was idealism. Then, too, . . . the "liberal" theology of the late nineteenth century . . . was also grounded in philosophic idealism. It has been suggested that the entrance of this Scottish common-sense realism into the South, borne partly by Presbyterian churches and colleges, contributed to the swing of the South away from free thought toward cultural and social conservatism. Whatever the cause, this rightward movement of the South had far-reaching importance for the Presbyterian divisions of 1837 and 1861, and for the reunion discussions of the 1860's.[130]

Thus far we have stressed speculative theology. But revivalist theology also has its kerygmatic side. Nichols describes the religion of New York Presbyterian churches during this period as "revivalist Calvinism." It fed on a generation (1800-1820) of revivals, the 'Second Great Awakening' in New England. The revivalism was to continue after 1825 but it was interrupted by Charles Finney's special revivalism called the "new measures." "The most shocking innovation to the New Englanders," Nichols writes, "was permitting women to exhort and pray in public meetings . . . The invasion of their parishes without their consent was another abuse. Some of the methods of prayer were also criticized."[131]

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[129] _Ibid_., pp. 112-13.

[130] Loetscher, _The Broadening Church_, p. 5.

The theological circle now closes. Theology must have its kerygma and its proclamation, but kerygma needs its speculative theology to survive. The danger of the popular-level proclamation is always that it can turn into a pragmatic moralism and lose its theological and 'God-centered' base. This was Trinterud's conclusion pertaining to the Great Awakening. Nichols draws the same conclusion for the later revivals. "But however good and useful," he writes, "they were something other than forgiveness, the new life of communion with God through Christ. There was a steady leakage both of revivalists and of their disciples to merely humanitarian reform."[132] Since this phenomenon seems to repeat itself in every era one understands the reaction of alarm of the nineteenth century churchmen. Faith atrophies when stifled by excessive law but it can equally well burn-up with excessive enthusiasm. The scene was soon set for another schism. From the New School side we have the accusation against the Old School of jealousy and of cowardice. From the Old School we have warnings against Socinian, Arminian and Hopkinsian heresies.

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[131] Nichols, Hist., p. 99

[132] Ibid., p. 113.

The Schism

The doctrinal issues errupted in a series of heresy trials. The most notorious was that of Albert Barnes, a Princeton seminary alumnus who had been converted while at Hamilton College. He was accused in 1830 of the "New Haven" heresy[133]--the very year he was 'called' to the Old First Church in Philadelphia. The following year the case came to the General Assembly where "at the motion of Professor Miller, of Princeton, a compromise solution was reached whereby the Assembly objected to some of Barnes' expressions but ordered no further proceedings."[134] This same General Assembly is noteworthy for another factor alarming to the Old School. Despite the advanced preparations of the Old School they lost control of the Assembly for the first time. Revivalist New York was growing faster and supplied the first New School moderator, N. S. S. Beman, of Troy. "The group in the Philadelphia Presbytery," says Nichols, . . ."was shaken. Their control of the institutions of the church hung by a hair. Some Old School men began discussing a possible division of the church."[135]

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[133] His "Way of Salvation" (A. Barnes, The Way of Salvation, A Sermon, Delivered at Morristown, New Jersey, Feb. 8, 1929 (7th ed.), New York 1836, as cited in Armstrong, *op. cit.*, p. 147.) was declared "highly objectionable and erroneous" by the Presbytery of Philadelphia: "I assume the free and full offer of the Gospel to all men, to be one of those cardinal points of the system by which I *gauge* all my other views of truth. It is, in my view, a cornerstone of the whole edifice . . . I stand as the messenger of God, with the assurance that all that *will* may be saved; that the atonement was full and free and that if any perish, it will be because they choose to die. . ."

At the General Assembly in 1834 the Old School minority circulated for signatures the "Act and Testimony." It contained a careful list of heresies and served as "a new league and covenant and a test of orthodoxy and the whole proceedure threatened revolutionary action and schism. . . ."[136] Preliminary to the 1835 Assembly the supporters of the "Act and Testimony" met in Pittsburgh. There the Old School formulated their platform and a "Memorial" was drafted to guide the Assembly: . . .

> . . . It was urged that the A.H.M.S. [American Home Missionary Society] and A.E.S. [American Educa-

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[134] Nichols, Hist., p. 119.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., p. 120.

> tion Society] be barred from Presbyterian bounds, and that the Plan of Union be abrogated and correspondence with Congregational bodies be ended. New School Theology was described as "another Gospel entirely and essentially different" from the Bible and Westminster Confession.[137]

At the Assembly the Old School broke through the New School majority and received a hearing for their pre-Assembly "Memorial." But they were unable to bring the issue to a vote. At the next Assembly the Old School party elected one of their members as Moderator. "Their choice was significant," notes Nichols, "--a Southerner and a slaveholder, John Witherspoon."[138] The slavery issue, cautiously suppressed until this time, finally came to the floor of the Assembly. The majority, however, voted to 'table' the matter in spite of the fact that almost all the New York New-School Presbyteries were abolitionists. "These were undoubtedly the considerations," marks Nichols, "that swung the South, hitherto divided over the 'Act and Testimony' and over Barnes, to vote as a unit."[139]

At the 1836 Assembly the New School majority was able to defeat the major proposals of the Old School, viz., to transfer the interdenominational Western Foreign Missionary

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[137] Ibid., p. 121, cited in Texts of "Western Memorial," "Act and Testimony," Memorial of 1835 in S. J. Baird Collections of the Acts . . . of the Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Publication), 1855, pp. 659-84.

[138] Ibid., p. 126.

[139] Ibid., p. 133.

Society to Assembly control and to discipline Albert Barnes for heresy. "The real question was, as Barnes himself had stated, whether such opinions could be held within the Westminster system of doctrine."[140] The Old School was outraged. "The exculpation of Barnes had seemed to demonstrate the impossibility of enforcing their Standards of confessional orthodoxy by disciplinary measures."[141] "Some were for immediate secession, but the majority preferred a last desperate effort to capture the next Assembly and thus be in a position to set the terms of the division."[142] According to Nichols[143] it was the peacemaking Princeton contingent[144] that was obstructing the revolutionary means. "A deputation called on the [Princeton] faculty in the fall and privately delivered an ultimatum," Nichols reports. "The committee was prepared to abandon Princeton and launch an uncompromisingly Old School seminary, for which they had a site . . ., directors, . . . and the assurance of Lenox money."[145] The professors played their expected roles. For their next move[146] the Old School met privately before the 1837 Assembly to agree on ways and means of effecting the division. The South was strongly represented in accordance with the strategy developed and Professor Baxter of Richmond was made president. They drafted a new "Testimony and Memorial."[147] When they saw that they held a comfortable majority at the Assembly the Old School "abrogated the Plan of Union as unconstitutional because it had never been submitted to the presbyteries."[148] Professor Baxter then proposed a sinister legal device.[149] The Plan of Union was abrogated; must not the churches erected on such a basis be "declared outside" the Constitution of the church? The declaration was made and in one Act "some six hundred churches and five hundred ministers, three fourths of them in New York State were exscinded."[150]

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[140] Ibid., p. 128.

[141] Ibid., p. 129.

[142] Ibid.

[143] See ibid.

[144] Professor Miller had mediated in the first Barnes trial and again was the head of a committee on the slavery issue (see Nichols, op. cit., p. 119 and p. 126).

[145] Ibid., historically there is only the support of silence for Nichols' asservations.

[146] See Armstrong, Loetscher, and Anderson, op. cit., pp. 153-56.

The interpretations differed. Nichols called the action an "ecclesiastical coup d'etat." Since each of the exscinded synods had defined slave holding as sin he makes slavery a key factor in the type of schism. "The break would almost certainly have occurred over doctrinal and polity matters," Nichols writes, "but instead of an excision of New York Presbyterians, it would probably have come as a secession of Pennsylvania Presbyterians."[151] The Old School interpreted their stand on constitutional grounds claiming that they did no injustice when they declared that Congregationalists are not Presbyterians. "The plan of union we believe to be unconstitutional . . .," they argued, "and the necessary operation of this decision is to declare the churches of this synod not to be a constituent portion of the Presbyterian Church."[152] The New School Report denounced bitterly the demagogic methods of the Old School and declared the proceedings invalid. Besides violating the principle of natural justice that no one should be deprived of his right without a hearing they argued that the Old School "violated the plainest general principles of Presbyterian government, and the express provisions of the constitution, by disposing of individual rights, without the intervention of the primary courts."[153]

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[147] See Nichols, Hist., p. 130.

[148] Ibid.

[149] See ibid.

[150] Ibid.

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[151] Ibid., pp. 131-33. Loetscher (Broadening Church, p. 5) comments: "It is now generally recognized that the slavery issue-though deliberately deemphasized by many at the time--constituted a third important cause of the Presbyterian Old School-New School disruption of 1837." (L. cites Sweet, Religion and the American Frontier, II The Presbyterians.)

[152] Armstrong, op. cit., p. 164, cited from the O.S. periodical, The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, 1837, pp. 465-67.

[153] Ibid., pp. 161-62, citing The American Biblical Repository, 1939, 2d series, I, 479ff., 491ff.

As to the final interpretation on the role of the slavery issue in the schism there is no conclusive evidence. For every accusation there is a denial. One can conservatively say that it was an important factor.

Two months after the "exscinding Assembly" a New School convention was held in the First Presbyterian Church of Auburn. Faculty members from Auburn, Union, and Lane drew up a protestation in which they expanded the protests they had made at the Assembly. In their protest[154] they claimed that not one of the exscinded synods or presbyteries had been formed on the basis of the Plan of Union, that 'the mixed churches' had been patterned after the Accommodation Plan of 1808 which was still in force, and that these comprised only one-third of New York churches. They argued that the only constitutional procedure for dismissal was by citation and trial. Finally, and most importantly, the Auburn Convention adopted a Protest list of "true doctrines" in answer to the errors drawn up at the Assembly. This document was eventually to be the semi-official platform for doctrinal reconciliation between the Old School and New School. "Apparently the Old School," notes Nichols, "generally accepted the Auburn Declaration as fair and adequate, both in 1837 and 1838 when they condemned it, and in 1868-1870 when they accepted it."[155] In the Spring of 1838 the New School officially sought "a nullification of the Exscinding Acts as unconstitutional and a return to the Church, but the Old School was adamant . . ."[156] The General Assembly celebrated its golden-jubilee (1788-1838) by forming two General Assemblies in the aisle of the Assembly hall.

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[154] Nichols, Hist., pp. 133-35.

Toward Reunion: Its Problems

The period of schism was a static one. The growing national problem was slavery and in 1857 the southern section of the New School Presbyterians severed connections with its northern majority. The same happened to the Old School at the

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[155] *Ibid*., p. 136. In general the *Auburn Declaration* was a defense of the Hopkinsian doctrine relative to the sixteen points raised by Breckenridge. Thus it attempted to save man's freedom as well as God's sovereignty and to diminish the ascribed depravity of nature due to the fall: ". . . Election to eternal life is not founded on a foresight of faith and obedience, but is a sovereign act of God's mercy, whereby, according to the counsel of his own will, he has chosen some to salvation; 'yet so as thereby neither is violence offered to the will of the creatures nor is the liberty . . . of second causes taken away, but rather established;' nor does this gracious purpose ever take effect independently of faith and a holy life.

" . . . While sinners *have all the faculties* necessary to a perfect moral agency and a just accountability such is their love of sin and opposition to God and his law, that independently of the renewing influence or almight energy of the Holy Spirit, they never will comply with the commands of God." (*Minutes of the Auburn Convention* . . . Aug. 17th, 1837 cited in Armstrong, *et al*., *The Presbyterian Enterprise*, pp. 168-69.)

[156] *Ibid*., pp. 136-37.

Civil War's outbreak. After the War the devastation pointed clearly to the need for reunion especially in the South. In 1864 it happened. The southern sections of the Old and New Schools united and re-named themselves the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern Presbyterians). This was a full five years before a similar reunion could be effected in the North. Three problems had to be resolved: (1) the slavery issue; (2) the polity issue concerning the Plan of Union, and (3) the doctrinal issue.

Concerning the slavery issue the answer was now simple. "The Old School," writes Nichols, "was led by events to take the antislavery position, which the New School had held all along . . ."[157] With regard to the Plan of Union circumstances had also changed the situation. After the schism during the 1840's and 1850's there was a new Congregationalist development "back to Congregationalism" at the expense of Presbyterianism and Presbygationalism. At their convention in 1852 the Congregationalists requested an end to the cooperative work under the Plan of Union and "urged Presbygational churches to insist on their full Congregational rights."[158] By 1861 the General Assembly of the New School set up its own Committee of Home Missions and the American Home Missionary Society became a solely Congregational society.[159] A great era was over but at least one good effect resulted: "The painful separation from Congegationalism removed the occasion for many Old School objections to the New School."[160] This left only the problem of doctrinal differences and at the time this problem was taking a back seat to practical exigencies. Circumstances had thus cleared the way for reunion.

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[157] *Ibid*., p. 167.

[158] *Ibid*., p. 150.

[159] See *ibid*.

With the antislavery and pro-reunion party in command[161] the Old School at their 1862 Assembly proposed an exchange of delegates. The proposal was accepted by the New School and the process was repeated for the next four years. For the New School the 'prophetic power' for reunion was to be Henry Boynton Smith. In 1850 he had come from Amherst to Union Theological in New York and in 1859 he became editor of The American Theological Quarterly.[162] His influence was considerable among both Old and New School theologians. As moderator of the New School General Assembly in 1864 he preached his famous sermon on reunion[163] inviting both sides to prayerful decision.

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[160] Ibid., p. 151.

[161] See ibid., pp. 167-68.

[162] Merged in 1862 with the Presbyterian Quarterly Review as The American Presbyterian and Theological Review.

[163] See Nichols, Hist., p. 169. His enthusiasm would be shared by his co-worker Philip Schaff and passed on to his student and admirer Charles Briggs.

The Reunion of 1869

A joint Committee met in New York City in February and again in May of 1867 and issued a report on the doctrinal and polity basis for reunion. This basis was agreed to be: "the Westminster Confession in its fair historical sense, as it is accepted by the two bodies in opposition to Antinomianism and Fatalism on the one hand, and to Arminianism and Pelagianism on the other."[164] The New School Assembly accepted the committee report unanimously but not so the Old School. One of the staunchest hold-outs was Charles Hodge of Princeton Theological and editor of The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review. In an article written after the February-May joint-Committee meetings he expressed his argument against reunion:

> . . . Those who have assented to this plan of union admit that the Old-school principle of subscription is right, and ought to be adopted in the united church, but they say the New school have adopted it, and *therefore*, and on that understanding, they are in favour of the union. They have been led into this serious mistake because the New-school members of the committee assured them that they did adopt the Confession as we do. This we doubt not *as to them individually*, but it is clear as day that it is not true of the New-school as a church. This being the case, union with that church, on the proposed programme, would be the renunciation of a principle to which 'the Old school are pledged by solemn vows.'[165]

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[164] *Presbyterian Reunion: A Memorial Volume*, New York, 1870, p. 257.

[165] Charles Hodge, "On Reunion," *The Biblical Repertory* and *Princeton Theological Review* 39 (1867), p. 520.

In a later article, commenting on the theological exposition of George Duffield, Hodge spells-out his theological differences: Duffield's theology convinced Hodge that the "fair historic sense" of the Westminster standards as understood by the New School was in diametric opposition to the Old School interpretation. The prevailing theology of the New School he characterized as the "new divinity" and the *Auburn Declaration* did not change his mind. His conclusion was simple and firm:

> *The question before us is a very simple one*. *Shall we give the foregoing theology* sketched by Dr. Duffield *equal liberty*, privilege, and authority in our Church *with that of our Catechisms and Confessions*? . . . Shall we subject our theological seminaries to their control . . . ? . . . Shall we bring back the intolerable strifes which . . . caused the disruption? Shall we, in short surrender unconditionally? For ourselves we say No, and in this we believe we speak the deliberate mind of our church.[166]

To Hodge's rhetorical questions Henry B. Smith replied that the New School adopted the Confession in the Calvinistic sense and said that the burden of the proof that this was not so lay with the accuser.[167] But "unexpectedly" Smith offered an amendment to the proposed *doctrinal* basis: "The Confession should be received 'in its proper historical, that is, the Calvinistic or Reformed sense.'"[168] "The New School contingent supported the amendment 46 to 2 . . . and, as Smith wrote, Hodge 'relented wonderfully.'"[169]

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[166] C. Hodge, "Doctrines of New-school Presbyterians," *ibid*., p. 674.

[167] See H. B. Smith, "The Reunion of the Presbyterian Churches," *The American Presbyterian and Theological Review* 5, (Oct.) 1867.

The final terms of Reunion were modified by the Smith Amendment--to define Calvinistic substance, and by the Garley Amendment, to authorize liberty of interpretation within the Reformed tradition.[170] The basis of union was simply the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice and the Confession of faith as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. Thus the 1869 Plan of Reunion stated:

> The reunion shall be effected on the doctrinal and ecclesiastical basis of our common standards; the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments shall be acknowledged to be the inspired Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice; the Confession of Faith shall continue to be sincerely received and adopted as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States shall be approved as containing the principles and rules of our polity.[171]

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[168] Nichols, Hist., p. 171, citing the Reunion Memorial, pp. 263-65.

[169] Ibid.

[170] See ibid.

[171] Presbyterian Reunion: A Memorial Volume, 1837-71, New York, 1870, p. 275.

In popular terms the basis of union was described as the Westminster Standards "pure and simple"--without qualifying or interpretative clauses of any kind. Loetscher observes that both Reunions (1758 and 1869) were effected by ignoring rather than resolving the doctrinal differences. The theological base was "broadened" by relaxing the subscription to it. "Clear cut definitions of Calvinism would not be enforceable . . . " Loetscher carefully notes, "and it would be increasingly difficult to project historical Calvinism against variations that might undermine its essential character."[172] In many ways Hodge's fears were not empty. The forces of freedom had won an important victory. But now one of her first pursuits would be for a valid theology of authority.

Concluding Remarks

In spite of the great surge of American missionary pragmatism in the ensuing decades the doctrinal issue was to remain primary. In fact it was to emerge for the first real time toward the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Possibly foreseeing and wishing to forestall this trend Charles Hodge and his supporters entered a final, formal "minority-Protest" concerning the

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[172] Loetscher, The Broadening Church, p. 7.

Arminian tendency of the self-admittedly "Hopkinsian" Auburn declaration (to be distinguished from the Auburn Affirmation coming nearly a century later). This protest was made in spite of the Old School vote that regarded "the 'Auburn declaration' as an authoritative interpretation of the New School type of Calvinism, and as indicating how much liberty they wish."[173] In a certain sense then the struggle for Hopkinsianism was pretty well won. The number of Presbyterian adherents favoring the universal salvific love of an all merciful God would increase more and more until the pressure for revision finally brought about a change in the excessively harsh sections of the Westminster Confession. (This will be the matter of our next chapter.)

What was to become the real doctrinal issue was still lurking on the outer-fringe of Christian consciousness. The slow 'transfer' value from Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) to Biblical criticism and to all doctrinal development would soon force an entirely new approach to doctrine and to revelation. American Christianity would then be brought out of her theological dark-ages. Loetscher made the application to Presbyterianism and to Calvinism. "The key theological idea suggested by the cultural outlook," writes Loetscher, "was perhaps the doctrine of God's immanence, which found humanity in God and deity in man and was congenial to optimistic developmental views."[174] Presbyterian theologians were slowly beginning to realize that theories of development were beginning to define all theological problems--revelation, sin, redemption, the personality of Christ, etc. The liberals were convinced that theology must adjust or die, but often failed to draw the lines between what traditions could be sacrificed and what were of the very essence of Christianity. Conservatives had the same problem. This time however even the mosaic-abrahamic ambivalence was to be subjected to the new theology of development. A positive theory was ascribed to the very tension between old and new which would focus more on 'development' than on 'change.' What had been limited to 'broadening' could now also become 'deepening.'

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[173] Cf., Minutes Old School, 1868, pp. 658-65, cited in Nichols, Hist. 172.

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[174] Loetscher, The Broadening Church, pp. 10-12.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONFESSIONAL REVISION

INTRODUCTION

General Remarks

One of the immediate effects of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century doctrinal awakening was the growing pressure for some sort of "confessional revision." This meant another stirring of the reunion-equilibrium. "The new theological issues rapidly coming to the fore," Loetscher writes, "meant that the equilibrium achieved in the reunion of 1869 could not be statically retained, but must continually be rewon by new discussions and new working arrangements."[1] Would the unification forces be strong enough to adapt? The answer for the first decade of reunion was a resounding affirmative; the reunion seemed to be going smoothly. From a greater distance however one could see the pot beginning to boil. Our focal-figure for this era will be Charles Briggs of Union Theological (New York). The major doctrinal issues were two: the long-coming clarification of and mollification of the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination and the challenge to the primacy of the doctrine of Scriptural (biblical) authority.

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[1] L. Loetscher, The Broadening Church, p. 18.

Briggs was well ahead of his time. He attempted to bridge and unite the 'old' and the 'new'--not only the actual Old School and New School parties but the spirits and theologies that made them. He lived toward the end of the 'external-or-polity phase' and the beginning of what continues to be the 'internal or doctrinal phase'of American Presbyterianism. Greatly influenced by the balanced perspective of his teacher and friend, Henry Boynton Smith, and later exposed to the new Biblical Studies in Germany, Briggs formulated his life-time ambition and ideal: ". . . (1) a more consistent and thorough doctrine of justification and sanctification suitable to the demands of the times; (2) in order to do this, a thorough study of Biblical theology; (3) in order to do this, a thorough study of practical acquaintance with the original Scriptures--with the cognate languages . . ."[2] Briggs' struggle epitomizes the dual Presbyterian problem--polity and doctrine (order and faith). "An advance in the study of the Bible," he held "is the nerve of the revision movement" and then added, "the terms of subscription are the real difficulty, the key to the history of the American Presbyterian Church."[3] A new creed he advised should contain only 'essential and necessary articles' subscribed to in a specific and concise formula. In this way Briggs envisioned[4] first the union of the Presbyterian family, then of all Protestantism and all Christendom--always however presupposing a truthful facing-up to real differences. This 'broad-Churchism' was to become the distinguishing characteristic of American Presbyterianism in the twentieth century. One of its fruits would be the 1967 Confession.

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[2] C. A. Briggs, "To H.B.S. Nov. 25, 1868," Briggs Transcript (Union Theological) No. 366, cited in L. Loetscher, "C.A. Briggs in the Retrospect of Half a Century," Theology Today (April 1955), pp. 28-29.

[3] Loetscher, art. cit., p. 38 quoting from Andover Review 13 (1890), pp. 45-46, p. 60.

In retrospect we are now able to better understand the problems entailed in all development. These include the problem of 'cultural lag' with its corrollary of 'expedient timing' as well as the problem of doctrinal continuity and/or discontinuity with past traditions. Above all is the problem of theology being sufficiently deep as well as broad. In new America one of the factors in the theological-lag was the lack of an established scholarly climate. In 1844 the twenty-five year old Philip Schaff, fresh from his German University, idealistically challenged the American Reformed Church to true scholarship. He was actually expressing a drive already latent in the church and awaiting its proper moment. His words serve as a blueprint for what would one day come alive among American theologians. He would play a vital part in the process as a senior Professor to Charles Briggs at Union Theological. The following is his challenge:

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[4] See C. A. Briggs, American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early History (New York: Scribner, 1885), p. xiii.

> Theology is no less necessary for the regeneration of Protestantism now than it was for the Reformation. . . . We are directed to search the Scriptures continually. It belongs to the inmost nature of faith that it should raise itself continually to clearer consciousness. . . . Christianity is not against reason, but only above reason. Thorough knowledge stands in covenant with faith, and is not possible without it. But faith should be ever struggling to become knowledge; Christianity should enter always more and more into the comprehension of reason. . . .
>
> Protestantism is the principle of movement, of progress in the history of the church; progress, not such as may go beyond the Bible and Christianity, but such as consists in an ever-extending knowledge of the Bible itself, and ever-deepening appropriation of Christianity as the power of divine life. . . . Protestantism must explore still further and further the inexhaustible mines of God's word. . . remembering always that there is still beyond measure much to be learned, and that she can never become complete in herself, except as her knowledge also may be carried to the highest point.[5]

Schaff verbalizes the 'new abrahamic spirit' that was to invade the Presbyterian theological world. Past history tells us that it will meet a struggle.

Outline

The present chapter will study two problems, that of revision and that of Scriptural authority. Historically it will be the forerunner of the Auburn Affirmation and even more so of the 1967 Confession. In this sense it returns us to the starting-point of our American Presbyterian history.

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[5] Philip Schaff, The Principle of Protestantism (Tr. by John W. Nevin-1845; Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1964), pp. 196-201.

THE PROBLEM OF REVISION

The General Background

The increasing emphasis of nineteenth century culture of man's power and responsibility led many Presbyterians in Europe and America to attempt to revise, or to change, the terms of subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. This positive view of man brought with it a reaction against the excessive predestinarian aspects of the inherited doctrine. In 1877 at the first council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches held in Edinburgh Philip Schaff urged that a 'consensus creed' be undertaken. The consensus however could not be reached and in 1884 the proposal was defeated by the pan-Presbyterian Council. This left the churches to their own independent action.

In the national Church of Scotland no change could be made without parliamentary action and the only procedure was to loosen the terms of subscription. The Scottish Free Church however preferred revision.[6] The English Presbyterians and the English and Armenian Congregationalists proceeded to draft new confessions. The American scene was more complex. It is difficult from our viewpoint to understand how animated, and even bitter, the feelings became. Dr. William Brown ascribed them not so much to any single doctrinal issue as to the two spirits already present in American Presbyterianism. "What the men of the Old School objected to," writes Brown, "was . . . the spirit of individualism and freedom, of flexibility and of change, or readiness to adapt old constitutions to new conditions, and to co-operate with all types of men for the bringing in of the kingdom of God."[7] Applying this to the revision crisis Brown sees "the same conflict."[8] The practical outcome of the New School theological development was that "Philip Schaff challenged the whole Presbytery of New York in 1889 that he knew no Presbyterian minister who preached reprobation or preterition."[9] This sentiment was echoed by Nichols and represented the pre-revision 'theological climate.' "Presbyterians generally had come to believe in God's intent to save all men," Nichols writes, "and wished to join to the affirmation of his free grace on election more recognition of human responsibility than the Confession allowed . . ."[10] The questions began to come: "whether to," "when to," and "how to" revitalize the Westminster Standards. The opinions were variously nuanced and several "key" debates became highly publicized.

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[6] See R. H. Nichols, Hist., p. 185.

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[7] William Adams Brown, Changes in the Theology of American Presbyterianism (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, [n.d.]), p.399 [reprinted from the American Journal of Theology 10 (July 1906), pp. 387-411.]

[8] Ibid., p. 403.

[9] Cf. P. Schaff, Creed Revision in the Presbyterian Churches (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), pp. 13-14.

[10] Nichols, Hist., 186, citing Schaff, op. cit., p. 69.

The General Theology of Confessional Revision

Scholarly voices always speak for timely and enlightened change. Intelligence dictates that the leading-edge must always lead and that there must be a time-lag in waiting for the evolution to reach the masses. Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Reformed theologian, took a conservative revision position precisely on this issue of timeliness. In doing so however he proposed a general theology of "confession" and of "confessional revision" which will set the theological stage for our American Presbyterian debate.

Kuyper espoused a 'high-church' theology of confessions. He asserted that a confession did not originate from man alone but was part and parcel of the "life of the Church," given not to one but to all generations. "God Himself created a more than ordinary movement in the current of church life," Kuyper says, ". . . and thus in the light of the Holy Spirit there was gradually evolved a clear, distinct, positive conviction, which has been formulated in our confession."[11] In the light of this confessional theology we can understand Kuyper's reluctance to tamper lightly with confessional revision. "The confession," Kuyper claimed, 'possessed rights conferred by God and conformed by history, and could only be deprived of these after due process of the law. Only the Word of God stood higher."[12] Only when the assembled churches assisted by 'the foreign churches' found that the Word of God demanded revision were they permitted to change the confession.

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[11] Abraham Kuyper, "Calvinism and Confessional Revision," Presbyterian and Reformed Review, 2 (1891), p. 392.

In the theology of confessional-revision another important issue is the "moment of the Spirit"--the question of timeliness. Kuyper applies this to the Dutch situation and gives four criteria.[13] They may help us in our analysis of the American Presbyterian scene. According to Kuyper the proposed revision (1) must be 'in the direction of the Church' as a richer unfolding of the Calvinistic principle, not a reaction against it; (2) must be practically unanimous; (3) must have adequate means for doctrinal formulation (ideas, etc.); and (4) must be parallelled by similar convictions in foreign Reformed Churches. Compared to that of his contemporaries in America Kuyper's theology of doctrinal development was sophisticated.[14] His practical conclusion however, that none of the four conditions were fulfilled in the American Reformed Church and therefore that there should be no revision, was far too unpragmatic for the progressive Presbyterian school. Nonetheless his main contribution is to lend perspective. His theology of revision had already reached its "reflexive-stage." It would take the drawn out struggle with biblical fundamentalism (well into the twentieth century) to bring American theology to such a stage of reflexiveness with regard to the theological process.

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[12] _Ibid_., pp. 391, 393.

[13] See _ibid_., pp. 394-96.

[14] In his _Principles of Sacred Theology_ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954 [tr. by J. DeVries, first published and translated in 1898, with an Introductory Note by B.B. Warfield]), pp. 596-98, Kuyper gives his more developed theology of confessions: "The absolute liberty is, moreover, indispensable, if theology is to discharge her duty to the confessional life of the Church. Not that the Church should yield summarily to every criticism of her confession. The

THE DEBATE ABOUT REVISION

The Beginnings of the Debate

With the many foreign precedents for revision and with the Alliance of Reformed Churches pushing for a consensus creed, American Presbyterians began officially to look into the revision possibility. In 1887 a series of articles appeared on the pros and cons of revision and in 1888 an overture for re-

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Church may not modify her confession, unless the conviction takes hold of her that some part of her confession cannot stand before the bar of the Word of God. But on the other hand her confession must be alive; in its truth and clearness it must rest upon the Church's consciousness of life itself, and thereby be so firmly rooted, that it cannot stand in fear of criticism. . . . Revelation was given in a historic and symbolic form to be worked into a dialectic form by us . . . We are offered no bread cut and sliced, but seed-grain, from which, by our labor, wheat grows, in turn to be ground into meal and made into bread. Hence the human factor is not doomed to inactivity, but stimulated to highest action, which action must always go through all sorts of uncertainty and commotion. By feeling only we find the way . . ."

vision from the Presbytery of Nassau was presented but tabled until the following Assembly. By that time fourteen more Presbyteries joined in an overture to study the matter of revision and the General Assembly "voted by an overwhelming majority to submit two questions to the presbyteries of the Church: '(1) Do you desire a revision of the Confession of Faith? (2) If so, in what respects, and to what extent?'"[15] The immediate result was controversy.

Since the debate will end with the Briggs' heresy trial we begin with his views. As co-editors of the Presbyterian Review Charles Briggs and Benjamin Warfield were fore-ordained to clash. Both were strong and determined men and their theological views were diametrically opposed. Their first clash came in an alternate series of articles on Scriptural authority with Briggs on the liberal side. Concerning revision the same course was inevitable,but took a time to develop. Briggs went through two phases concerning revision--at first agreeing with Kuyper and Warfield but not too long afterward opposing them. His change of allegiance to the progressive side was made definitive in his bombshell book, Whither? In it he 'sharply' challenged the scholasticism of the venerable Princeton Faculty. "The tone was so far from objective," remarks Loetscher, "that

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[15] Loetscher, op. cit., p. 41, citing G.A. Mins., 1889, p. 79.

. . . even friends regretted it. But there was enough theological correctness in the attack to make it hurt."[16]

In a paper presented to the New Brunswick Presbytery on June 25, 1889 Warfield presented his case for not revising the Confession. He proposed three reasons:[17] (1) the subscription formula was broad enough to express the common faith without bringing "each of our idiosyncrasies to expression;" (2) we consider our situation toward our standards incapable of improvement as far as public expression is concerned; and (3) there is no hope of bettering the Confession either in the doctrines it states or in the manner in which it states them. "We are convinced," concludes Warfield, "that the Westminster Confession is the best, safest and most acceptable statement of the truths and the system which we believe that has ever been formulated."[18] A few weeks later in an editorial note in the Presbyterian Review, Briggs presented his 'earlier thought.' His historical sense led him to agree with Kuyper on the untimeliness of revision. He too offered three reasons[19] for non-revision in which he was much more specific than Warfield: (1) the statements of the Calvinistic system in Westminster are the most cautious, firm, and guarded that can be found and cannot be trusted to any living set of divines for improvement; (2) many objections are not valid against the historic sense, as for example, the accusation of fatalism; (3) if we are to hold to historic Calvinism we can't introduce Arminian or semi-Arminian statements. In agreement with Kuyper, Briggs thought the Church was passing through a transition period during which it was wise to hold to the creed and let it measure "orthodoxy" and "departure from it." In addition to non-revision the 'early Briggs' also rejected the thought of a new creed but recommended that if need be the subscription formula could be broadened.[20] In both of these points he was in agreement with Warfield, and in both of them he was soon to change.

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[16] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[17] See John DeWitt, Henry J. VanDyke, Benjamin B. Warfield, William G. T. Shedd, "The Presbytery of New Brunswick and The Westminster Confession," Ought the Confession of Faith to be Revised? : A Series of Papers (New York: Randolph and Company, 1890), p. 39.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See C.A. Briggs, Whither? A Theological Question for the Times, (3rd ed; New York: C. Scribner, 1890), pp. 466-68.

Assisted most likely by the argumentation of Dr. Henry Van Dyke (see below), Briggs' opinion first changed with regard to the 'untimeliness' for a new creed. In an address delivered before the Presbyterian Union December 2, 1889 he asked for a 'new creed' and for 'definite subscription.' He did this while at the same time pointing out that there were twenty chapters of Westminster in advance of the present Church and that the changes required existed in only three or four chapters. Actually it was to be the third and tenth chapters of Westminster that were to draw all the attention including the accusations of "fatalism" and "negativism." "In some way or other it is necessary that we should testify to the wonderful love of a living God and Saviour to the world;" Briggs wrote, "and above all we need a confession in which Jesus Christ, our Saviour shall reign supreme from centre to circumference . . ."[21] He said that such a change could only be made in the form of a new creed born of the spirit and life of the age. It should not replace Westminster but supplement it. Concerning subscription Briggs argued that the present terms were a torture to the tender-conscienced, a bar of iron to the rigid Calvinists, and a rope of sand to loose thinkers. He advocated a 'middle way,' the way of definite-subscription. "The second step," Briggs said, "should then be to define what these essential and necessary articles are."[22] Again he recommended that the best way for this definition would be by a new creed. Briggs' final contribution pertained to the few necessary "excisions" in the Westminster Confession. Most of the practical debate had been taking place concerning these excisions. "There are statements in the Confession that are so offensive to many of our best ministers," Briggs said, "that there is a serious danger of losing them from the church. Therefore remove the offensive statements. This may be done for the most part by excision."[23] Briggs specifically singled out the chapter on reprobation of infants and heathens: "There can be no peace until the doctrine of the universal damnation of the heathen and their babes is removed from the creed of the Presbyterian Church . . ."[24]

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[20] See C. A. Briggs, "General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (An Editorial Note)," The Presbyterian Review, 10 (July 1889), pp. 467-70.

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[21] C. A. Briggs, "The Advance Towards Revision," in Llewellyn J. Evans, Marvin R. Vincent, Samuel M. Hamilton, Erskin N. White, Charles H. Parkhurst, Charles L. Thompson, Charles A. Briggs, How Shall We Revise the Westminster Confession of Faith?: A Bundle of Papers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), p. 16.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Briggs' remarks epitomize the ongoing Presbyterian problem. It focuses itself at the crossroads of doctrinal growth and polity, or more concretely at the crossroads of biblical authority and ecclesial-confessional authority. Briggs struggled to develop his own thought. For him the answer to the Christian riddle lay in progress, development, and theological work. "We cannot retreat in theological definition " he wrote. "Progress is to be made by more exact definitions in theological science, not by suppression of truth and ignoring of differences in order to a superficial and transient harmony."[25] Three-quarters of a century later we are witnessing the verification of his prognosis.

The Struggle for Revision

By October of 1889 Warfield and Briggs were to come to the end of their co-editorship of The Presbyterian Review and the American Presbyterian Church would almost come to another schism over the growing differences between the majority at Princeton and the majority at Union. (This schism we will see came later in 1936 when the ultra-conservative Princeton Fundamentalists finally left the Church.) The primary spokesman for the pro-revisionists became Henry J. Van Dyke Sr. of the New York Presbytery. He was opposed by Warfield of Princeton and John DeWitt of Lane Seminary. Van Dyke Sr. was the hero who patiently and perserveringly went through the painful rabies theologorum largely contributed to by the stubborness of Warfield. It would fall to his son to reap the fruits of his work. The younger Henry van Dyke was instrumental in the final revision formula as well as being the primary architect of the new "unofficial" Brief Statement of Faith.

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[23] *Ibid.*, p. 32 [24] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

[25] Briggs, *Whither?* p. 275.

Dr. Van Dyke Sr. began his case by disagreeing with Warfield and the early Briggs with regard to loose-subscription and advocating in its stead revision in three areas.

> There are three areas which fully demonstrate the necessity and practicability of revision.
>
> (1) . . . that God foreordains men to eternal death simply and solely for their sins . . .
>
> (2) . . . that all infants dying in infancy are elect, and therefore regenerated and saved . . .
>
> (3) . . . that the salvation of the Gospel is sufficient for all men, adapted to all, and freely offered to all, and that the eternal decree of God hinders no one from accepting it.[26]

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[26] Henry J. Van Dyke etal, op. cit. (n. 17), p. 45, from an article from the Herald and Presbyter, July 31, 1889.

To the Van Dyke proposal DeWitt's response was simply to repeat the argument for broad-subscription, broader comprehension. "Dr. Van Dyke's avowed object is to get rid of supralapsarianism," DeWitt argued; "Certainly, I shall not vote for an amendment intended to make the platform of the Church too narrow for those men to stand on. Dr. Van Dyke's amendments will make the Confession of our Church less liberal than it is."[27] To raise an opinion to a _dogma de fide_ should require much deliberation, DeWitt continued to argue. "The change ought not to be made without the clearest and most explicit warrant of Scripture " he said. "We Presbyterian ministers and elders are doubly fortunate in possessing a creed composed by men who understood . . . this distinction."[28] The underlying "principles" or "forces" of the debate now began to appear. For Van Dyke it was the basic matter of growth and reform or its denial that was at stake. His argument is crucial:

> . . . _inasmuch as the Word and Spirit of God are given to us even as to the Westminster divines_, is it not reasonable to hope that the Revision of our Creed will lead to as good results in the nineteenth century as it did in the seventeenth?
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> . . . As to the proposition that our liberal terms of subscription render any revision unnecessary, it is altogether aside from the question before us. No friend of revision complains that the church is too strictly bound to her creed; we have all the liberty

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[27] _Ibid._, pp. 17-18.

[28] _Ibid._, p. 29.

> in that respect which we desire. But our contention is that the creed does not with sufficient clearness express the faith of the Church in certain specified particulars. . . .
>
> . . . Our danger now does not lie in the direction of theological controversy, but in indifference to doctrinal truth.[29]

Van Dyke's argument is clear and Briggs seems to have been one of his first converts. After two-hundred and fifty years of non-confession-ing the pro-revisionists chose not to be put-off any longer by the 'rope of sand' type of subscription.

The Warfield-Van Dyke segment of the debate brings out the detail. With regard to the "infant elect" (the issue of chapter 10) Warfield confesses his own firm belief that dying infants are saved, and he admits there are strong arguments in Scripture and in the Confession for this position. "But I think it far better to leave the Confession as is," he adds, "rather than to force into it a dogmatic definition of a doctrine which many among us still believe rests on a pious hope rather than in clear Scripture."[30] Van Dyke agrees with Warfield's point. He suggests however a revision which would leave the possibility of all infants being elect and definitely remove any possible implication that any infant was not-elect.[31] The more significant dispute concerned the Third Chapter (Of God's Eternal Decree) and its possible 'supralapsarian' interpretation--that God willed the damnation of some men antecedent to man's sin. The details of the dispute lend themselves to rhetorical heightening. Van Dyke for example argued from Warfield's confusion of the singular (Decree) with the plural (Decrees) that, whereas the Confession itself makes no distinction between positive and negative reprobation (using the singular), Warfield tried to make a case for it.[32] Dr. Shedd answered for Warfield in a rhetorical vein: "Will Dr. Van Dyke say that his revered theological instructor, Dr. Charles Hodge, would have conceded for an instant that there is any ground for this charge in the Westminster statement concerning reprobation? And does he not believe that Charles Hodge correctly understood the phraseology of the Confessions?"[33] And so the debate went on and on.

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[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 33-37.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[31] See *ibid.*, p. 76.

The only denouément to such argumentation was a standoff which Van Dyke recognized:

> He [Shedd] affirms that "there are no such errors" in the Confession. We affirm that there are such errors; and so we stand face to face.
>
> It is delightful to observe how entirely we agree as to what the Confession ought to teach. We differ only in the question of fact as to what the Confession does teach. He denies, and I affirm, that there is need of amendment upon the two points above recited.[34]

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[32] See ibid., pp. 67-68.

[33] Ibid., pp. 101-03.

[34] Ibid., pp. 108-110.

Van Dyke concluded that he simply wished to add to the Standards the very explanation Shedd "read-into-them." This would be the eventual outcome. A Declaratory Statement by way of an explanatory note was added to the third and tenth chapters.[35]

The Core Issue

The core of the Presbyterian dissatisfaction concerning Westminster's doctrine of the Decree[s] was "what was not said about God's love." There was consequently a real push for an addenda statement to Westminster. Van Dyke was once again an able and tireless spokesman. He argues that the ultimate and dominant reason why he advocates revision is that Westminster does not state or declare God's universal, salvific love and that He does not will that any should perish. "The most they claim to have shown," says Van Dyke, "is that there are statements in the Confession which imply what I maintain it does not declare. It is useless to go over the same ground again. Let our ministers and laymen read the Confession . . . and judge between us."[36] Warfield's final retort simply states that a reading of the Confession proves Van Dyke wrong, and that the Confession is "long enough already." One sentence of Warfield's retort epitomizes its spirit. "In one word," he writes, "ought we to demand that a Confession should be framed as if it were a proclamation of God's love to sinners? That is the function of a sermon. A Confession . . . is the Christians' expression of what God has done for them."[37] Van Dyke ended the debate (and soon after his life) with a prayer: "May God give us all perservering grace to speak the truth in love, and to demonstrate that the odium theologicum is a thing of the past."[38] The revision he said had already come in the hearts of many.

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[35] The statements were worthy of the long struggle and they make all the tedious rabies theologorum disappear. They once and for all remove from Calvin, Calvinism, and Westminster a stigma that was more often exaggerated and caricatured. We quote from the Declaratory Statement finally accepted in 1903: ". . . First, with reference to Chapter III of the Confession of Faith: that concerning those who are saved in Christ, the doctrine of God's eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine of his love to all mankind, his gift of his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and his readiness to bestow his saving grace on all who seek it; that concerning those who perish, the doctrine of God's eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine that God desires not the death of any sinner, but has provided in Christ a salvation sufficient for all, adapted to all, and freely offered in the gospel to all; that men are fully responsible for their treatment of God's gracious offer; and that no man is condemned except on the ground of his sin." (The Proposed Book of Confessions, p. 153)

Van Dyke's hopes were fulfilled posthumously in the words of his son who was the prime author of the Declaratory

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[36] H. J. Van Dyke, op. cit. (n. 17), pp. 117-19.

[37] Ibid., pp. 120-125.

[38] Ibid., pp. 126-27.

Statement, the New Chapters, and the unofficial new Brief Statement of Faith. The Preamble and the new Chapter--Of the Love of God and Missions give testimony that the father's spirit lived on in his son:

> [Preamble]
>
> Whereas, it is desirable to express more fully the doctrine of the Church concerning the Holy Spirit, Missions, and the love of God for all men, the following Chapters are added to the Confession of Faith:
>
> [Of the Gospel of the Love of God and Missions]
>
> (1) God in infinite and perfect love, having provided in the covenant of grace, through the mediation and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, a way of life and salvation, sufficient for and adapted to the whole lost race of man, doth freely offer this salvation to all men in the gospel.
>
> (2) In the gospel God declares his love for the world and his desire that all men should be saved; reveals fully and clearly the only way of salvation; promises eternal life to all who truly repent and believe in Christ; invites and commands all to embrace the offered mercy; and by his Spirit accompanying the Word pleads with men to accept his gracious invitation . . .[39]

Failure and Ultimate Victory of Revision

The official action of the Church followed upon the heated debates. "The way to the satisfactory disposal of the revision question," wrote Warfield, "was undoubtedly prepared by the discussion and settlement with almost entire unanimity of the matter of the proper methods [polity] of effecting changes in the Confession."[40] The out-come of the Assembly debate "turned on the necessity of preserving in any provision for amending the Standards, the core of the Adopting Act, viz., the concurrent action of two-thirds of the Presbyteries followed by the agreement and enacting of the Assembly."[41] The Revision Committee had their draft ready for the General Assembly of 1891 and it was circulated among the Presbyteries with the final report being presented by the Committee in 1892 in the form of twenty-eight overtures. By the time for the vote in 1892-1893 no one of the overtures received the necessary two-thirds vote while all but one received a majority vote. The great body of the church was evidently in favor of the work, but not apparently in sufficient number for Constitutional changes. A complicating factor arose in the heresy trial of Dr. Charles Briggs. "As one of the revision's leading advocates the suspicion of his unsoundness," writes Nichols, "was very damaging to its cause. He and others charged that his accusers deliberately pressed his case to stop the revision movement."[42]

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[39] The Proposed Book of Confessions, pp. 152-153.

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[40] B. B. Warfield, "A Note on the Presbyterian General Assembly [of 1890]," The Presbyterian and Reformed Review 1 (1890), p. 490.

[41] Ibid., p. 491.

[42] Nichols, op. cit., p. 187.

In the spring of 1894 following the Briggs verdict a Presbyterian League was organized to seek the reversal of the heresy decision, while expressing a desire for "more theological liberty, and confessional revision."[43] By 1900 the "revision-forces" had re-gathered their strength and "nearly forty Presbyteries overtured the Assembly to resume the discussion."[44] The chairman of the Committee of Fifteen appointed to report in 1901 was Henry van Dyke (son of Henry J.) of Brick Church, New York. The Committee prepared a brief and non-technical statement of the Church's faith. It was "largely drafted by Dr. van Dyke and made no reference to reprobation or inerrancy."[45] In addition it proposed amendments for the third and tenth chapters (as we have seen) and added chapters on the Holy Spirit (XXXIV) and on God's Love and Missions (XXXV). At the Assembly of 1902 it took less than two hours for the whole proposal to go through and the Assembly of 1903 merely had to ratify it once two-thirds of the Presbyteries had assented. "One might say," wrote Nichols, "that New School theology had captured the church."[46]

The Brief Statement of Faith to which the greater part of time was devoted by the revision committee "because not offered as an ammendment to the Confession was heartily acclaimed at the time but never as fully used by the Church as its merit might have warranted."[47] Its tone William Brown describes as "religious rather than speculative . . . with sterner truths subordinated to the great unifying purpose of love."[48] Loetscher agrees with the praise.[49] Although a few years later the Assembly rejected a proposal that the Brief Statement be adopted as the creed of the church it was to be an important precedent for the Confession of 1967 (and might prove to be an even more important step to future Confessional revision).

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[43] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 196.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 196.

[46] *Ibid.*

The Fruits of the Revision

One of the first fruits of the revision was reunion with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church which had split at the time of the 1801 Plan of Union. The Cumberlanders had taken exception to the regular Presbyterians on two issues: the education of the ministry and the doctrine of predestination.[50] After the revision thanks especially to the Brief Statement the differences disappeared. At the time of reunion the Cumberland group issued the following Declaration:

> It is mutually recognized that such agreement now exists between the systems of doctrine contained in the Confessions of Faith, of the two churches, as

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[47] Loetscher, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

[48] Wm. Brown, art. cit., p. 411.

[49] See Loetscher, op. cit., p. 88.

[50] See Schaff, I, 815.

> to warrant this union--a union honoring alike to both. It is recognized also that the doctrinal deliverance contained in the Brief Statement of the Reformed Faith, adopted in 1902 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 'for a better understanding of our doctrinal beliefs,' reveals a doctrinal agreement favorable to reunion.[51]

The reunion verifies Briggs' principle of ecumenical theology distinct from ecumenical cooperation. Doctrinal development has the primary role in ecumenical theology. "The differences cannot be solved by conquest," writes Briggs, "but only by some higher knowledge and better adjustment of the problems through an advance in theological conception and definition."[52] The further question can always be asked whether certain differences justify ecclesiastical separation. The United Presbyterians would be the next group to give a negative reply.

A second fruit of revision was the new type of "broadening" that came to the American Presbyterian Church. The older polity-type-broadening ("loosening the subscription") was rejected. The new type consisted of deepening and developing doctrine in line with Briggs' 'higher-knowledge and more exact definition.' We close our inquiry into the revision problem where we began with an idealistic vision from Philip Schaff, this time as a septuagenerian:

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[51] F. W. Loetscher, "Fifty Years . . .," An Address . . . at the . . . 132nd General Assembly (art. cit., Ch. 1 fn. 29), p. 34.

[52] Briggs, Whither?. . ., p. 239.

> Let us be honest and confess that old Calvin*ism* is fast dying out. It has done a great work . . ., but cannot satisfy the demands of the present age. We live in the nineteenth, and not in the seventeenth century. Every age must produce its own theology and has its own mission to fulfill. We may learn wisdom and experience from the past, but we ought not to be slaves of the past, and recognize no final and infallible authority but that of Christ. We must believe in the Holy Spirit, who is guiding the Church to ever higher life and light. He produced reformations in the past, he will produce greater reformations in the future. . . .
>
> We need a theology, a confession, that starts not from eternal decrees, which transcend the utmost limit of our thoughts, nor from the doctrine of justification by faith, nor from the Bible principle, nor from any particular doctrine, but from the living person of Jesus Christ, the God-man and Saviour of the world. We need a theology and a confession that is inspired . . . not by the idea of Divine justice which is a consuming fire, but by the idea of Divine love, which is life and peace.[53]

THE SCRIPTURAL PROBLEM

Beginnings of the Debate

"The church at large," notes Nichols, "had finally caught up to the New York Synod with regard to the eternal decrees. But in the matter of Biblical inspiration New York was still a generation ahead of the church at large."[54] If we had to isolate *the* problem of the twentieth century American

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[53] Philip Schaff, "The Revision of the Westminster Confession," *The Presbyterian Review* 10 (Oct. 1889), pp. 550-52. It is perhaps noteworthy that this was the last issue of this jointly co-edited periodical between Warfield and Briggs, Princeton and Union.

[54] Nichols, *Hist.*, p. 196.

Presbyterian Church it would be that of Scriptural authority and the whole area of authoritative development of doctrine as part of the revelational process. This complies with our initial focal-figure Dr. Charles Briggs and also with the Auburn Affirmation as our turning-point. It is time now to look at the Briggs case in terms of the growing problem of biblical authority--"the struggles whereby the church first accepted and later rejected the Princeton attitude toward the Bible."[55]

The Protestant scholastics were forced to seek an authority for their views over and against the Roman and Anglican views of authority, and, as we have seen, the extremists tended to follow 'the tendency' expressed in Calvin's long excursus on the authority of the Bible. The danger was obvious. "The Protestants," writes Loetscher, "sometimes compromised their basic conviction that Christianity was primarily a personal saving relationship to God by faith, which could never be exhaustively stated in propositional form."[56] Loetscher mentions Francis Turretine of Geneva as giving formulation to this type of scholastic Calvinism--with the formal summaries, state-of-the-question, sharp analysis, division and sub-division. Reason was given a large place although always subject to revelation. Inerrancy was taught and biblical criticism was strongly opposed. In the United States Princeton Seminary was to give fullest expression to this Reformed Scholasticism. "The so-called 'Princeton Theology,'" notes Loetscher, "seemed to offer an almost mathematical demonstration of an unchanged and unchangeable religious outlook."[57] With its bias toward 'reason' the result was that theology became more and more separated from Christian experience.

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[55] Loetscher, _op. cit._, p. 21.

[56] _Ibid._, p. 20.

In Dr. Archibald Alexander, the seminary's first professor and a great admirer of Turretine, "is to be found, in germ, the entire Princeton Theology."[58] But it was for Alexander's pupil Charles Hodge "to give classic expression to Princeton Theology."[59] He developed the theory of canon and inspiration proposed by Dr. Alexander. "Inspiration is not confined to moral and religious truths, but extends to the statement of facts, whether scientific, historical, or geographical " Hodge wrote. "It extends to everything which any sacred writer asserts to be true."[60] Assured of an inspired and inerrant Bible, Princeton Theology supposed it as the foundation of its theological method and structure. Archibald Alexander Hodge succeeded his father as the one best suited "to perpetuate the traditional character of Princeton Seminary."[61] He confined inspiration to the lost first manuscripts "thus removing the evidence beyond refutation, and also beyond use."[62] "More clearly, too, than his predecessors," adds Loetscher, "he seems to have sensed what has become an acute metaphysical problem, the problem of possible 'point of contact' between the infinite and finite, eternity and time."[63] Francis L. Patton became Princeton's President in 1881 and followed the same course as his predecessors. He was "sharp in his criticism of the current demand for progress in theology."[64]

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[57] _Ibid._, p. 21-22. [58] _Ibid._, p. 23. [59] _Ibid._

[60] _Ibid._, pp. 23-24, citing Hodge, _Systematics_ I, 163.

[61] _Ibid._, p. 24.

At this point Charles A. Briggs comes upon the scene. After graduating from Union Theological he studied biblical criticism in Germany. At the time of the 1869 Reunion of the Old and New Schools he wrote to his Professor, Henry B. Smith: "I am connected with the Old School and would prefer that side to the other--but I feel more sympathy with the mediating theology."[65] After his return to Union however his tolerance with 'Princeton theology' began to lessen and "he urged that the critical study of the Scriptures be not fettered by traditional or dogmatic views."[66] By 1880 the Princeton-theology and the new biblical criticism were to meet head on. Briggs and A. A. Hodge as co-editors of the newly founded Presbyterian Review agreed to publish a series of eight articles on the pros and cons of higher criticism.

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[62] Ibid., p. 25. [63] Ibid. [64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., p. 27. [66] Ibid.

The first article on "Inspiration" was written by A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield. It is important according to Loetscher--"because the theory it expresses was soon embodied in the official action of the Presbyterian Church and because in this article Princeton doctrine accepts the ultimate implications of its own position."[67] Hodge's part of the article defends his previously described theory of inspiration and inerrancy. It is significant however that in this article he acknowledges "that the doctrine of inspiration is not essential to Christianity."[68] "Though Dr. Hodge and the Princeton tradition thus openly admitted that their high doctrine of inspiration did not have priority in their system of theology," Loetscher criticizes, "they built their entire theological system on the assumption that it was true, and then had to defend it to the hilt to save their theological system."[69] Their refusal to recognize this inconsistency determined the course of the theological history of the Presbyterian Church and of much of American Protestantism for the next fifty-years. In his half of the article Warfield put the burden of proof on the opposition. He claimed that "the doctrine of Scripture inerrancy can be overthrown only by proving that error existed in the original (and now lost) autographs."[70]

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[67] Ibid., p. 30. [68] Ibid., p. 31. [69] Ibid.

Briggs article in July 1881 seemed "to accept most of the a priori limitations imposed on higher criticism by Hodge and Warfield . . . ."[71] In essence however it was "an all out attack on 'scholastic theology' as the deluded foe of evangelical Biblical criticism."[72] Briggs was accused of subjectivity in establishing the canon independently of the historical-apostolic argumentation.[73] This may be true if one merely reads the one article, but our earlier survey has shown that his later thought was more highly nuanced. The paradox to the controversy was that the 'Princeton theologians' in their enthusiasm for an "objectively founded biblical authority" (in their fear of subjectivity) tended to undermine the more fundamental Reform principle of the Spirit's ultimate authority.

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[70] Ibid., The article "Inspiration," The Presbyterian Review 2 (1881), p. 237f.) concludes: "The writers of this article are sincerely convinced of the perfect soundness of the great Catholic doctrine of Biblical Inspiration, i.e. that the Scriptures not only contain, but are the Word of God, and hence that all their affirmations are absolutely errorless, and binding the faith and obedience of men. . . when the ipsissima verba of the original autographs are ascertained and interpreted in their natural and intended sense. [Or else] let it be proved that each alleged discrepant statement occurred in the original autograph in which it is said to be found."

[71] Loetscher, op. cit., p. 32

[72] Ibid.

[73] See ibid. where Loetscher cites a letter by C.W.Hodge.

Briggs' Controversy with the Princeton Theologians

In his controversial book, Whither? Briggs attacks the Princeton theory of inspiration especially in its correlate problem of inerrancy. "The awkward fact stares us in the face, that these Princeton divines risk the inspiration and authority of the Bible upon a single proved error," Briggs writes; "Such a position is a serious and hazardous departure from Protestant orthodoxy. It imperils the faith of all Christians who have been taught this doctrine . . ."[74] On the occasion of his inauguration to the new chair of Biblical theology Briggs lost all moderation. His address(entitled "The Authority of Holy Scripture")listed the barriers to the operation of divine authority in the Bible. No one could doubt the referents. The primary barriers were: (1) a superstitious bibliolatry; (2) the doctrine of verbal inspiration; (3) too much anxiety for biblical authenticity; and (4) the doctrine of inerrancy. "This was a called shot" remarks Loetscher, "at the central teaching of the Hodge-Warfield article which was on the verge of being proclaimed the Church's official doctrine."[75]

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[74] Briggs, Whither?, p. 72; see pp. 69-72, 86.

[75] Loetscher, op. cit., p. 49.

Briggs' main attack however remained against that 'orthodox_ism_' which "assumes to know the truth and is unwilling to learn." "That man or church whose orthodoxy does not make progress," Briggs argued, "ceases thereby to be orthodox, and from the necessities of the case becomes heterodox."[77] The conclusion to his inaugural address railed against the very core of 'Princeton theology'.

> Let us cut down everything that is dead and harmful, every kind of dead orthodoxy, every species of effete ecclesiasticism, all merely formal morality, and all those dry and brittle fences that constitute denominationalism, and are the barriers of Church Unity. Let us burn up every form of false doctrine, false religion, and false practice. Let us remove every incumbrance out of the way of a new life; the life of God is moving throughout Christendom, and the springtime of a new age is about to come upon us.[78]

Even friends felt forced to apologize for Briggs. A crisis arose and the General Assembly of 1892 voted that the New York Presbytery should hold a formal trial. So strong was the feeling on biblical authority at this time, even among the New School men, that the Assembly voted in favor of the Portland Deliverance whose key sentence was: "Our Church holds that the inspired Word, as it came from God, is without error."[79]

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[77] _Ibid._, p. 8.

[78] Armstrong _et al_, _op. cit._, p. 252, citing Briggs' address on "The Authority of Holy Scripture."

[79] _G. A. Mins._, 1892, p. 179.

At the General Assembly of 1893 the further interpretative statement was added: "This General Assembly reaffirms the doctrine of the deliverance of 1892, viz., that the original Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, being immediately inspired of God were without error . . . and that this has always been the belief of the Church."[80] The Hodge-Warfield theory was now officially the Church's position.

The 1893 General Assembly also rendered its judgment on the heresy case and did "hereby suspend Charles A. Briggs from the office of a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America until such time as he shall give satisfactory evidence of repentance . . . for the violation of said ordination vow."[81] An official protest was immediately registered by eighty-seven delegates. It registered a strong complaint against the Assembly:

> 1. Because it is insisting on a certain theory of inspiration, when our Standards have hitherto only emphasized the fact of inspiration.
> 2. Because it is dogmatizing on a matter which, necessarily, we can have no possible knowledge.
> 3. Because it is insisting on an interpretation of our Standards which they have never borne, and which, on their face, is impossible. No man . . . has his mind on the original autographs.[82]

Conclusion: The Presbyterian Problem

We have come again to our turning point the Auburn

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[80] G. A. Mins., 1893, p. 163.

[81] Ibid., p. 165.

[82] Ibid., pp. 167-68.

Affirmation where the ecclesial (polity) problem meets with the problem of doctrinal development. What had happened to Briggs also happened to his staunch advocate Henry P. Smith and almost happened to Smith's Lane Seminary compatriot Dr. Arthur C. McGiffert. After the 1892 Portland Deliverance "the General Assembly seemed increasingly ready to define the Church's 'essential doctrines' by Assembly resolutions."[83] The General Assembly of 1899 "'unanimously' adopted a declaration that four doctrines were 'fundamental doctrines' of the Church."[84] As we have seen in the preludes to the Auburn Affirmation this practice was to become more crucial until it was finally challenged as unconstitutional at the General Assemblies of 1925 and 1927.

The convergence of the ecclesial and the doctrinal at the beginning of the twentieth century present what we call "the Presbyterian problem." Two church forces were vying to control the Presbyterian confession. For the moment "those who advocated strict doctrinal conformity and opposed a more inclusive type of church had won another victory,"[85] but the final disposition was to follow the course of action already taken at the time of the revision crisis which showed "that

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83 Loetscher, op. cit., p. 72.

[84] G.A. Mins., 1899, pp. 95-99, cited in Loetscher (ibid.).

[85] Loetscher, op. cit., p. 74.

the Church was ready to make some theological alterations in response to the spirit of the times . . . ."[86] Thus the first phase of the doctrine-polity problem concerned freedom for the so-called 'abrahamic forces.' Loetscher placed the key to solving this phase in the seminaries. "The ultimate answer to this question," he wrote, "depended in part on the theological complexion of the teaching which ministerial students would receive in the Church's seminaries."[87] This would have special application in the case of Princeton. It would take nearly half of the twentieth-century for Princeton to live-out the days of her "Princeton Theology."

The direction of needed future development can now be surmised. All Christianity seemed to be converging on the doctrinal, more precisely on the fundamental 'theology of doctrine' itself. What is its method of evolution? How, if at all, does it become an authoritative part of the revelational-traditioning process? That which had been achieved in the _development of_ Calvin's theology of divine sovereignty had to be done now with his epistemology of faith, theology of revelation,and ecclesiology--all in their mutual interrelationship. The ensuing decades would see the theological evolution take a funny twist. The victory of freedom over a narrow ecclesiasticism and biblicism would be won only to have a second phase of the authority problem state itself amid the newly won freedom. It would concern the church and her needed authority in the process of doctrinal growth; hence especially her teaching-authority. The final question would come to church infallibility. When both phases of the Protestant authority Problem are brought together the ecumenical question states itself: can one theology of authority ever contain both individual freedom and ecclesial (communal) infallibility under the ultimate authority of the one Spirit? Or to end where we began: can the abrahamic and mosaic forces be balanced in one community of the Spirit?

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[86] _Ibid_., p. 89.

[87] _Ibid_., p. 74, thus Loetscher writes (ibid.): "The relation between the American Churches and their theological seminaries was a reciprocal one: the theology that the seminaries taught at any particular time was soon widely held throughout the churches; and, contrariwise, changes in the Churches' activity and thought . . . created demands for changes in the curricula of the seminaries.

PART III. THE CONFESSION OF 1967 : THEOLOGICAL CLIMATE AND ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONFESSION OF 1967: INTRODUCTION AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

The Theological Depression

"One might compare the two decades from 1925 to 1945," writes Nichols, "with the experience of the Colonial Old Side Church and that of the separate New School Church in the 1840's and 1850's."[1] "It was a time," he says "of low religious vitality, of decreased giving and curtailed missionary programs, of static or relatively decreasing membership, of shrinking Sunday schools, of inadequate replacements in the ministry."[2] The turning point which came with the Auburn Affirmation stemmed the holding-action of the conservative Fundamental school. By 1936 the Princeton fundamentalists under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen went into schism and formed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Only after this radical excision could Princeton seminary come to life.

The Seminary Problem

We have heard Dr. Loetscher's prognosis that theology would grow in proportion to seminary education. During the time of the religious-depression the Princeton picture was bleak. "The Presbyterian Church was a decidedly conservative force in theological education " Loetscher writes. "Presbyterian seminaries continued to favor systematic theology and its foundation in Biblical studies over against the newer disciplines. This was a bulwark against theological innovation."[3] Union withdrew from the Church after the excommunication of Professor Briggs, and Lane 'tightened' her policy after the Smith case. These losses alone cost the church years of delay in her theological renewal. For a long while only Auburn Seminary kept alive the spark for new theology. Auburn achieved great growth preceeding the theological depression years.[4] Under George B. Stewart (President 1899-1907) the policy was set that Auburn 'should throw its full strength on the side of theological progressivism.' His work was furthered by Dr. Allen Macy Dulles followed by Dr. Robert Hastings Nichols. These men represented a minority of theologians who were seeking to adjust to new cultural forces. Then came the economic depression and Auburn was included among its casualties. There was some consolation in the fact that Auburn was absorbed into the new structure at Union Theological in New York. Concerning this quasi-merger Nichols comments: "it [Auburn] became, as it were, the explicitly Presbyterian organization within the new interdenominational structure of Union."[5] The leadership in progressive theology now undoubtedly centered itself at Morningside Heights. Under the Presidency of Henry Sloane Coffin Sr. and with a faculty including Niebuhr and Tillich it became the most important theological center in America--especially of the 'neo-orthodox' current which was replacing the old liberalism. "Thus once again as with the New School modifications of predestinarianism, and with the historical approach to the Bible " wrote Nichols. "New York led the church into fresh theological paths. The churches began to feel the impact of this new direction in the fifties as the students of these teachers became pastors."[6]

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[1] Nichols, Hist., p. 225.

[2] Ibid.

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[3] Loetscher, op. cit., p. 75.

[4] Ibid., p. 76.

This leaves Princeton which so far has been described under the egis of the so-called 'Princeton theology.' Until his death in 1921 Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield, Princeton Theological's President, dominated the seminary scene. "As the forces of theological change became gradually stronger," Loetscher notes, "the seminary set itself even more resolutely to defend the theological status quo."[7] "But there had always been in the seminary's theology," he adds, "elements out of which broader theological policies could be fashioned."[8] Thus in 1920 Dr. van Dyke wrote a friend concerning the 'Machen school' at Princeton that "the best men there, like Stevenson, Erdman, and Loetscher, stated [it] in much milder and more attractive language, and do not think . . . liberal believers should either go out or be driven out of the Presbyterian Church."[9] Loetscher's appraisal of his father is of interest here. "He was perhaps the closest of the faculty 'minority' to the viewpoint of the faculty 'majority,'" he writes, "but a disinclination to dogmatism and to extreme views of every sort made him increasingly dissatisfied with the steadily sharpening policies then prevailing."[10] The differences between the groups at Princeton reached a breaking point when van Dyke surrendered his pew in the First Church of Princeton ostensibly due to Machen's sermon polemics. "The real point of issue," Loetscher says, "was whether orthodoxy and tolerance were compatible."[10] President Stevenson admitted to a difference of viewpoint on ecclesiastical policies, but he himself stood for tolerance. "Shall Princeton Seminary," he argued, "be permitted to swing off to the extreme right wing so as to become an interdenominational Seminary for Bible School-premillenial-secession fundamentalism?"[12] "The

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[5] Nichols, Hist., p. 235.

[6] Ibid., pp. 235-36.

[7] Loetscher, op. cit., p. 136.

[8] Ibid., p. 137. Loetscher mentions John DeWitt and John D. Davis who "represented a noticeably broader theological and ecclesiastical attitude."

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[9] H. van Dyke to D. S. Schaff, January 23, 1924 from the Henry van Dyke Papers in Princeton University Library, cited in Loetscher, ibid., p. 139.

[10] Loetscher, loc. cit.

[11] Ibid., p. 142.

[12] Ibid., p. 143.

majority of the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary," said the Presbyterian Banner, "will not tolerate a difference, not of doctrine, but even of attitude towards doctrinal differences in others."[13] The Assembly of 1929 finally settled the Princeton issue by adopting the majority report of an appointed Committee which provided for an amended Charter under a new Board of Directors. There resulted a semblance of peace and normalcy, but Loetscher looked deeper. "The unfolding of events had finally made mutually incompatible two tendencies which had existed side by side in the Princeton Theology from the beginning " he notes. "It was best for both parts that open bifurcation came at last, and that each could develop more fully."[14] For our overall perspective it should be noted that relative to American Presbyterianism as a whole both segments of Princeton represented the forces of the 'status quo.' Beyond the Halls of Ivy there lay another 'theological world' such as the one already described at Union Seminary in New York.

The fundamentalists caused one final eruption in 1936 whereupon the unbending Dr. Machen was "suspended from the office of a minister in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America."[15] Loetscher quotes one of the presbyters as tracing the whole controversy to the influence of Warfield. His former pupils it was said are now carrying on his principles: no modification of the Confession of Faith, and no union with anyother Presbyterian denomination unless they accept our interpretation of the Confession. "I would say, wrote the presbyter, "that that position requires that the results of Biblical study and of discussion of one hundred years ago ought to be regulative of our attitude today."[16] Forty-six years previously (1889) the senior Van Dyke had written similar sentiments. He atributed Warfield's reluctance for change to fear of 'waking the sleeping Giant' and to the exaggerated sentiment that all things should continue as they were. "With the conservative sentiment," Van Dyke said, "I have a large sympathy; but do not share at all in what seems to me an unfounded and unworthy fear."[17] Far more incisive was the prediction of Dr. L. J. Evans (the Defender of Briggs and Smith). In 1890 he had written:

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[13] Presbyterian Banner, December 9, 1928, p. 8 cited in Loetscher, ibid., p. 144.

[14] Loetscher, op. cit., p. 147.

[15] Ibid., pp. 151-52.

> We have a secret suspicion that the Nemesis of the logical dilemma will one day overtake them with Erinyan fury . . . Their timidity is not personal. It is the accident of their position. Dogmatism is ever sounding the alarm. But there is a more serious side to the case. Let me emphasize the fact that the opposition to Revision is confessedly the expression of a serene and solid (shall I write it

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[16] Ibid., p. 152, citing the Commission Hearings (of 1935), pp. 642, 651.

[17] "The Confession and God's Infinite Love to Men," The Presbyterian, (November 16) 1889, pp. 126, 131.

> stolid?) satisfaction with the present status quo of Presbyterianism and Calvinism. Why agitate for anything better than we have? Is this . . . the spirit which should rule the church of today?
>
> . . . we would fair see a Confessionalism that dared trust itself; . . . that bore within itself the promise and potency of development; that could adapt itself more intelligently to the new conditions of scientific, critical, and religious thinking.[18]

And now we will see these "abrahamic-forces" again grow restless in the search for new development.

The Creative Period of American Presbyterianism

The two decades from 1940-1960 witnessed a new creativity--"one of the most creative periods in the history of the Church to which I have the honor of belonging" writes John Mackay. The renewal was to take place in every area: in the seminary-training, especially concerning the curriculum, as well as in the practical field, witnessed primarily by the catechetical revival of the 'New Curriculum' and the pastoral 'New Life Movement.' There was a close parallel between the socio-cultural changes in the United States and the new dynamism found in the American Churches. It was an existential dynamism skeptical about human reason and authoritative systems of theology. "But by a salutary paradox," one historian writes, "this Christian existentialism insisted that the Christian can have personal knowledge of the unchanging God who encounters man in revelation."[19]

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[18] L. J. Evans, "Dogmatic Confessionalism Versus Revision," in Briggs _et al_, _How Shall We Revise?_, pp. 41-44.

By 1948 the 'New Curriculum' was a reality and was presented to the churches. Its goal was to equip the church with educational materials which it was not ashamed of theologically and intellectually. To effect this goal authors of real competence were gathered--one a future committee man for the 1967 Confession, Union's Professor James D. Smart. *The Annual Report of the Board of Christian Education* (1947) presents the major ideal and theme of the 'new curriculum.' Two factors, the Report states, *control* the *Church's teaching*: (1) God's revelation of himself given once and for all in Christ and recorded in the Scriptures and (2) the particular situation and needs of those to be taught. It must be evangelical and it must be relevant. Two errors are to be avoided: (1) teaching as though the only thing necessary is to communicate a body of information and not the Person of Christ; and (2) making the self-development of the pupil the goal and organizing principle instead of 'the light of the Gospel.' Thus there will be both an infinite variety of approach and constant freshness which comes from taking the human situation in earnest while at the same time there will be a consistency reflecting God's changeless truth. The principle that must above all guide our efforts as teachers is that of our instrumentality. "That God is known," the Report concludes, "is ever afresh an act of his grace and love whereby he himself comes today to be the God of those who are willing to receive him in repentenance and faith. We can at most be instruments."[20] In this thematic Report on the 'New Curriculum' we recognize the best strains of European neo-orthodoxy.

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[19] Armstrong, Loetscher, etc., *op. cit.*, p. 301.

Prelude to Confessional Revision Again

The occasion for again discussing revision was supplied by the various proposals for union between the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (the northern group) and the United Presbyterian Church of North America. The proposal at one stage included the Presbyterian Church in the United States (the southern Presbyterians). These proposals went as far back as the post World War I era. An actual plan was drawn up and presented to both churches in 1934 but the United Presbyterians decided that things were too premature at that time. Exploratory commissions were again set up in 1938 and by 1943 the second Plan was submitted and declined (to be twice repeated in 1946 and 1949). A triple Plan, now including the Southern Presbyterians, was proposed in 1951 and re-proposed in 1953, but the Southern

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[20] Ibid., pp. 301-303, citing Annual Report of the Board of Christian Education, 1947, pp. 83-84.

Presbyterians rejected it. By 1956 another two-way Plan was drawn up and in 1958 the union was approved forming the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. At the same General Assembly a Committee of Fifteen was appointed to formulate a Brief Contemporary Statement of Faith. It was actually the more conservative of the two churches, the United Presbyterians, whose 1925 Preamble to Westminster included the principle of confessional reform.[21] This principle was adopted by the new combined Church with happy results as John Mackay notes: "Happily, in these last years, a sense of the living reality of the Holy Spirit has been growing in Presbyterian and other Christian Churches."[22] "A Confession of Faith which contains a chapter on the Holy Spirit," comments Hendry, "is reminded of the limited scope and function of all doctrinal formulations which can point toward the gospel but never contain it."[23]

In line with the 'new curriculum' one of the crucial areas for reformulation or revision would be that of revelation and Scripture and their interconnection. The younger Van Dyke's 1902 Brief Statement of Faith promised hope of a confession with a christocentric theology of revelation, but it never received constitutional status. The pertinent section reads:

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[21] Ibid., pp. 288-289.

[22] John A. Mackay, The Presbyterian Way of Life (Engle-Cliffs: Prentice-Hall), 1960, p. 70.

[23] Ibid.

> We believe that God is revealed in nature, in history, and in the heart of man; that He has made gracious and clearer revelations of Himself to men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; and that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh is the brightness of the father's glory . . . We gratefully receive the Holy Scriptures, given by inspiration, to be the faithful record of God's gracious revelations and the sure witness to Christ, as the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life.[24]

Much depends on which antecedent (Christ or the Scriptures?) the 'Word of God' and the 'rule of faith' (the last two phrases) refer to. The Confession of 1967 will clarify once and for all the proper antecedent: Christ, the Word of God, who is the revelation.

The General Theological Climate

Before we study the 1967 Confession we must understand something of its theological climate and of the theological changes which came about antecedently in American Presbyterianism, especially at Princeton. The era of the 'new curriculum' also witnessed a 'new Princeton Seminary,' curriculum and otherwise. Looking back over the changes Dr. John Mackay, the President from 1939 until 1960, described them in terms of 'the broadening church.' "In a few years," said Mackay, "the cathartic had done its work. The Church received a new understanding of its heritage and mission. Theology was restored to its traditional place."[25] The primary beneficiary of the 'new understanding' was the seminary. "Seminaries," he said, "must be the 'seed beds' of true culture. Seminaries are called to give leadership in all that relates to the restoration of culture."[26]

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[24] G. A. Mins., 1902, p. 93.

Concerning theology, and especially the theology of revelation, Princeton followed the leads of Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. Before World War II Brunner was invited to Princeton as a permanent Professor but chose to come for only one year. Barth's influence was felt long beforehis first visit in 1962. Mackay paid personal tribute to Barth:[27] (1) for leading him to restudy the Church and its place in God's plan as central to Christian life and witness; (2) for teaching him to teach Christians that it is more important to listen to God in the Bible than to acquire information about the Bible; and most important (3) for showing him that the Bible above all witnesses to Jesus Christ the Word who is the core of revelation and the clue to its interpretation. Mackay had one serious reservation with Barth, his rejection of any role for 'Christian experience.' On this matter he felt Barth's later writings on Sanctification (C.D. III and IV) showed a change. In these works Barth explores the life of God in the soul and the work of the living Christ in the believer. "The most crucial issue," says Mackay, "concerns life and not merely light . . . This is a problem not merely for theology but for the ecumenical movement."[28] By way of summary to the general theological-climate we continue to follow Mackay's lead. "While 'neo-Calvinism' and 'neo-orthodoxy' are by no means synonymous with the Reformed Tradition," he writes, "it is true that thinkers belonging to this tradition, such as Barth and Brunner, . . . have led the van in an effort to develop a system of Christian truth for our time."[29]

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[25] Mackay, op. cit., p. 52.

[26] J. A. Mackay, "Editorial," Theology Today, 7 (1950), p. 150.

[27] J. A. Mackay, "Bonn 1930-and after: A Lyrical Tribute to Karl Barth," Theology Today 13 (1956), pp. 289-91.

General Influence of Barth and Brunner on the 1967 Confession

In opposing the 1967 Confessional Proposal Geoffrey Bromiley compared the theology of the 1967 Confession with that of Barth, and concluded to definite influences. Referring to the proposal's section on the Bible Bromiley detects doctrine "strongly reminiscent of Barth's teaching."[30] Bromiley cites the following comparable elements: (1) Christ is called the Word Incarnate (lines 175ff. with C.D. I, 1 and 2); (2) Scripture is the "witness" (175ff., 180 and 183 with I/2, 19,1); (3) the stress on God's present speaking (187 with I/2, 19,2); (4) biblical words as words of men (192f. with I/2, 19,2); (5) concentration on the historical and relative nature of thought-forms with the implication that they are inadequate or erroneous (193ff. with I/2, 19,2). Bromiley claims however that the Confession errs by leaving out the Barthian safeguards:[31] (1) the Confession does not guard the normativeness and precedence of the Bible over preaching; but, placing preaching before reading, the ~~Bible~~'s normativeness is only by way of the "faithful;" (2) the Confession doesn't give the very words of Scripture the uniqueness Barth gives them, a version of verbal inspiration by which God speaks through the very words; (3) Barth gives the Bible a direct, absolute, and material authority (I/2, 20, 1) in virtue of its special use by the Spirit that frees it from the church's decisions. Bromiley concludes that the Confession with its generalization leaves the way open for liberalism ("he will continue to speak through human culture" l.200f.) and 'Romanism' with its list of relative authorities. For Bromiley this destroys the entire thrust of evangelical dogmatics which requires a witness that has direct, absolute and material authority.

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[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 292-93.

[29] Mackay, *The Presbyterian Way of Life*, p. 46.

[30] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The '1967 Confession' and Karl Barth," *Christianity Today* 10 (March 4, 1966), p. 560, the line numbers refer to the Proposed version (later amended). We quote the section on the Bible in the next chapter.

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[31] *Ibid*., pp. 560-61.

Besides showing the general influence of Barth on the 1967 Confession, Bromiley's interpretation of Barth's theology of biblical-authority serves the more important function of introducing the problem of biblical-authority as it presented itself at the time. Even though Bromiley is careful to qualify his 'direct, absolute, and material' authority for the Bible as existent only when the Bible is used by the Spirit, his interpretation: (1) seems to contradict Barth's own mind and (2) seems colored by an excessive protectivism of the older orthodox conception of 'objective biblical authority.' Barth seems to take pains not to leave himself open to this mis-interpretation which is precisely why he makes biblical authority 'mediate' or 'non-direct' even under the Spirit. Bromiley's criticism (not a condemnation!) of the Confession's proposal of a biblical-authority that acts only through the 'faithful' is another clue to his orthodox leaning. We offer two sections from Barth which clearly demonstrate his mind on the 'mediacy' of biblical authority. Note also how he insists on the dynamic reciprocity between the objective-witness (Bible) and the subjective-believer (here and now 'hearing' the Word) always under the Spirit. This in no way minimalizes the normativeness of Scripture. It does however protect the sovereign freedom of the Spirit and the freedom of the believer.

In his own edition of Barth's Church Dogmatics I/2, Bromiley records Barth speaking on the Authority of the Word:

> The unique revelation did not take place in vain, nor did that unique relationship of obedience take place in vain. Both the revelation and the obedience of the prophets and the apostles, continue to exist: indirectly, but in full unbroken reality, a copy of the revelation in which this is always truly and validly present, and a model of the obedience, which even though there are no more prophets and apostles, can and should be seriously repeated in every age. This authentic copy of revelation . . . is therefore the content of the witness of the prophets and apostles in Holy Scripture. It is therefore true that Holy Scripture is the Word of God for the Church, that it is Jesus Christ for us. The result is that in their witness the Church itself has to do personally with the Lord. Therefore in the per se mediate, relative and formal quantity of Scripture, in which their witness is presented to us, it has to do with the self-subsistent and self-maintaining direct and absolute and material authority, with its own existence, nature and basis.[32]

Another section from I/1 takes up the issue of biblical-authority and again indicates Barth's care and precision in guarding against any threat to the sovereignty of the Spirit by a bibliolatry. Barth asks:

> Why and in what respect does the Biblical witness possess authority? In that it claims no authority whatsoever for itself, that its witness amounts to letting the Something else be the authority. . . . Therefore we do the Bible a poor honour, and one unwelcome to itself, when we directly identify it with something else, with revelation itself.

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[32] Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, tr. by G. T. Thomson and Rev. Harold Knight; ed. by Rev. G. W. Bromiley and Rev. Prof. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), I/2, 20,1, p. 544 (italics ours).

> Such direct identification of revelation and the Bible . . . is not one to be presupposed. . . . It takes place as an event, when and where the word of the Bible becomes God's Word, i.e. when and where the word and the Bible functions as the word of a witness. . . . Therefore, where the Word of God is an event, revelation and the Bible are one in fact, and word for word one at that.
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> According to all that has been said, revelation is originally and immediately, what the Bible and Church proclamation are derivatively and mediately, God's Word. We said of Church proclamation, that from time to time it must become God's Word. . . . Now "from time to time" had to do, not with human experience . . . but, of course, with the freedom of God's grace.
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> . . . Revelation is itself the divine decision, which takes effect in the Bible and in proclamation by availing itself of them, which therefore confirms, preserves, and fulfils them. It is itself the Word of God which the Bible and proclamation are, by becoming it.[33]

In Bromiley's commentary we have a foretaste of the entire dispute leading to the amendment of the proposed Confession. The 'neo-orthodox problem'[34] had to be involved in the Confession. The whole history of Presbyterianism culminating in the schism of Machen's Princeton-fundamentalist party revolves about this problem of biblical-authority and revelation. As a dual reaction against the Liberal Protestantism of the Schleiermacher school and the rationalism of orthodox scholasticism neo-orthodoxy situated itself at the dead-center of the problem.

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[33] Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, tr. by G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), I/1, 4, 3, pp. 124-35 (italics ours).

[34] According to Paul L. Lehmann, "The Changing Course of a Corrective Theology," Theology Today, 13 (1956), p. 336, "'Neo-orthodoxy' is thus a term which denotes the historical position of Barth's re-orientation of the course of Protestant theology. The term . . . belongs to historical rather than to doctrinal or systematic theology. . . . Neo-orthodoxy is the theological movement in contemporary Protestantism which seeks to correct both liberalism and the orthodoxy against which liberalism rightly protested, by a return to and a contemporary reinterpretation of the fundamental and formative significance of the Bible in the theology of the sixteenth century Reformers, chiefly Luther and Calvin." (Italics are Lehmann's.)

Barth and Brunner, the rivals from Basel and Zurich, are the two neo-orthodox 'fathers.' Thoroughly opposed to liberalism, both nevertheless sided with the liberal rebellion against the hyper-rationalistic scholastic concept of revelation. Brunner sought the way out in an interpersonal emphasis on the revelation-faith experience as an "encounter." Barth emphasized the sovereign freedom of the divine Word with initially little more than mention of the believer and his human 'point of contact.' (Concerning this latter there arose the famous feud with Brunner.) To set the theological climate for the 1967 Confession we will study the salient points of the Brunner-Barth doctrines of revelation and biblical authority, and then study their influence on the leading theologians of the Confession's planning Committee of Fifteen. Since there are no direct footnotes we can at best hope for indirect 'signposts' of influence along with the argument from the general theological climate. We study Brunner's ideas first for in many ways his influence seems to be the earlier and broader, and Barth fills in many of his lacunae. One cannot really study the two men independently; their basic themes are in deep resonance and require constant cross-reference.

EMIL BRUNNER

Introductory Comparison with Barth

Emil Brunner is more the theological extrovert than Barth and his approach was more orientated to the evangelical-apologetic aspects of theology than that of his Basel contemporary. Brunner gave his own comparative description as follows:

> His Romerbrief written in 1918, I hailed as a forceful confirmation of my own thoughts. My enthusiasm was all the more understandable because Barth, as well as our mutual friend Edward Thurneysen, came from that circle in the center of which Hermann Kutter and Christoph Blumhardt had been. While I was trying to state the case for this new theology at Union Seminary, Barth was breaking into the camp of German theology. My first more extensive work Die Mystik und das Wort (The Mysticism and the Word, 1924) which was a critical assessment of Schleiermacher proved to be an effective weapon for the new theology in the sharpening conflict with Liberalism. . . . Der Mittler (The Mediator) was . . . the first presentation of the doctrine of Christ in terms of the dialectical theology. Barth's Christliche Dogmatik (Christian Dogmatics) appeared a little later.[35]

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[35] Charles W. Kegley (ed.), The Theology of Emil Brunner ("The Library of Living Theology," Vol. III, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 8-9.

Both Barth and Brunner were to 'correct' the 'radical-immanentism' of the Schleiermacher school on the one hand and Kierkegaard's 'radical-transcendentalism' on the other. They moved toward what could be described as 'a more reasonable incarnational-dialectic.' In doing so Brunner emphasized (evangelically!) the Christian-anthropological, Barth the Christocentric-theological.

Continuing his autobiography Brunner explained[36] that his own answer to the practical question of proclaiming the gospel to a secularized world was to root the problem in anthropology. Stimulated by Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber he put aside the 'rationalistic-thought-scheme' of object and subject in favor of the personal I-thou scheme which he saw was the biblical scheme. In this Brunner claimed to be closer to Kierkegaard than Barth. His anthropological insight led him next to the more fundamental question, to the concept of truth. Here he opted again for the biblical as opposed to the Greek understanding of truth. "The old concept of revelation was freed of its intellectual misunderstanding," he writes, "and the basic connection between knowledge and communion came to have its rightful place. In this I see my most important contribution to the theological concept of knowledge."[37] This 'Christian conception of truth' as centered in personal encounter (Wahrheit als Begegnung) was to remain Brunner's focal-concept. In his own opinion it was this concept that helped solve the traditional 'epistemology of faith' and 'authority' problems. He developed his idea in Offenbarung und Vernunft and finally in his three-volumed Dogmatik. He explains:

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[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12 This "point of contact" Brunner later clarifies as the "apologetical point." Thus while on a mission to Japan he writes (p. 19): "The orientation of my lectures . . . to students in many . . . Japanese universities, who were for the most part non-Christians, made necessary a clear recognition of what I had long ago postulated and called the "point of contact." Now . . . it became of primary importance to find "the point of contact." That very concept, which in the early days of dialectical theology had caused so much controversy, and which I had defended so stead-fastly against a doctrinaire theological opposition, proved to be that thing that decided success/or failure of Christian teaching. Also I came to realize that it was exactly that aspect of theology which I had called "the other task," and which traditionally is known under the name of apologetics, which was of greater importance than the mere exposition of the Christian or biblical doctrine and which the interest of my non-Christian students was primarily focused upon. . . . The presentation of the impact which Christianity had made upon the basic problems of life . . . proved to be a good approach . . . The most important way leading to Christ is, of course, the transparency of Christ's spirit in the character, . . ., life, and . . . face of the one who presents the Christian doctrine . . ." One can see from this how the Barth-Brunner dispute over apologetics and the power of the human reason was bound to arise. One also sees how, given the "missionary" nature of the Church, Barth would have to agree to a need for the apologetical task once he grasped the problem. He has not to our knowledge written about it directly.

> In this writing I became aware of the fact that a dual concept of faith is characteristic of all post-Reformation Theology: faith in Christ and belief in the Bible as the infallible word of God. This dualism was blurred by the distinction of a material and formal principle of the Christian faith;

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[37] Ibid., p. 12.

> namely justification or reconciliation by Jesus Christ and the Scriptures as the all-comprehensive object of faith. By the consistent identification of revelation with God's self-communication, thereby overcoming the fatal distinction of object and subject, I hope to have made a decisive contribution to removing this dual conception of faith . . .[38]

With this problem we are familiar.

Brunner's Epistemology of Faith

The fundamental problem with Brunner's epistemology lies in the relationship between personal-encounter and knowing-truth. As we watch his thought develop the one question will keep recurring: in the process of communication is there any 'objective-truth-content' communicated? Tillich's essay on Brunner centered immediately on this point:

> Every existentialist epistemology faces the problem of how the knowledge by encounter and the knowledge by objectifying detachment are related to each other. Brunner is fully aware that the "Word of God contains doctrine in some way and the faith . . . entails knowledge (The Divine-Human Encounter, 22)" . . . and Brunner says in the same context that God "instructs us authentically" about Himself. Doctrine is not the Word of God, but it is the "token and framework" within which we have the Word, and the one cannot be separated from the other. . . .
>
> Brunner shows a great consistency . . . He always tries to elaborate the existential meaning of a doctrine and to distinguish from it the doctrinal formulation . . . In his own solution he always refers to the Biblical intention, which has been distorted in the objectifying reflection of theology. This method seems to me fruitful and adequate to the theological task.[39]

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[38] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[39] Ibid., p. 102 (Tillich's article "Some Questions on Brunner's Epistemology").

Brunner admits to a Kantian influence. "I have generally held to the critical standards of Kant up to this day " he wrote. "In this I was repeatedly encouraged by my friend . . . Heinrich Barth, with whom I have always had more intimate contact than with his more famous brother, Karl."[40] Brunner's anti-metaphysics and no-natural-theology positions find their roots no doubt in his Kantian epistemology. The ultimate root seems to be in the theology of the Fall with its effects on man's natural reasoning power. This doctrine sooner or later makes its appearance on the epistemological scene. Otto Piper recognizes the problem and calls the emphasis excessive:

> Restoring the authority of the Bible will therefore mean that we must utilize the ample information which the Bible provides concerning God's dealing with this world. In particular we must realize that excessive emphasis which Protestant theology has laid upon sin and grace has critically narrowed down the area in which people looked for God's revelation. Not only was there a disregard of the wholeness of human life but also of man's relation to the universe which surrounds him.[41]

For now we can only agree with Piper's implication and continue the analysis.

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[40] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[41] Otto A. Piper, "Protestant Theology's Predicament," Theology Today, 20 (1963-1964), p. 485. According to Jewett (Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation, pp. 92-93) Brunner's theology of the Fall is a mixture of Kierkegaard and Kant. We ought to live this way, therefore we must. Original sin consists in making the 'ought' into a 'can' and rationalizing the contradiction at the core of our being. Joseph Smith

Brunner's Theology of Revelation

Brunner's theology of revelation, epistemology of faith, and doctrine of biblical authority, according to his own sketch, are most clearly expressed in The Divine-Human Encounter (which translation of Wahrheit als Begegnung he did not like) and in his Revelation and Reason (Offenbarung und Vernunft). His theology of revelation has close similarity with the earlier quoted passages from Barth's C.D. I/1 and I/2. From their common origins as "correctors" of the Schleiermacher-Kierkegaard revolt against biblical rationalism this is not surprising. "Revelation," says Brunner, "means supernaturally, miraculously given knowledge of that which man absolutely cannot know."[42] On the receiving end this 'knowledge' is different qualitatively from our other knowledge: "it must be received by faith as a venture without support

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("Primal Revelation and Natural Knowledge of God," Theological Studies, 27 (1966) p. 346) cites Brunner (Dogmatik, I, 138) as favoring the more traditional doctrine of the Fall, "in the postulate of the radical corruption of man by sin and the dogma of sola gratia." Therefore whoever affirms a natural-theology denies the reality of sin and its effects. It is interesting, however, that Brunner does acknowledge sufficient natural-knowledge of God to make man culpable of sin. (Cf. Smith, "Emil Brunner's Theology of Revelation," Heythrop Journal, 6 (1965), pp. 8-9, citing Offenbarung und Vernunft, pp. 53-78; Dogmatik, I, 19-20; and Natur und Gnade, pp. 12-14, 46))

[42] Jewett, op. cit., p. 94, citing Offenbarung und Vernunft, p. 24.

[other] than . . . the word of another outside ourselves."[43] Such a revelation-faith process "involves on our part a break with all Immanenz, because in faith we see God as Creator and ourselves . . . as sinful creatures forgiven in Christ."[44] In this "knowledge" the believer "no longer sees himself as the all-embracing subject, but as a creature he is the 'subject who is embraced,' with a finite, . . . not an autonomous reason."[45] Thus the fundamental thesis of his _Wahrheit als Begegnung_ is the 'personal-encounter (_Personbegegnung_).' Man must "meet in faith the God who meets him in His Word."[46]

The 'becoming truth' which happens in the 'divine-human encounter' cannot be talked about. This ineffability of the faith-encounter was brought out in one of Brunner's earliest essays: "Revelation is not something about which we can speak. In that we speak _about_ it, we no longer speak about _it_."[47] And even his later works maintained this personalist-existentialist (non-propositional!) view of revelation.

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[43] _Ibid._, pp. 94-95.

[44] _Ibid._, p. 95, citing _Offenbarung_ . . ., pp. 388-89.

[45] _Ibid._, p. 96.

[46] _Ibid._, citing _Wahrheit_ . . ., p. 62.

[47] Ibid., citing from an earlier (1925) and smaller work _Philosophie und Offenbarung_, p. 51.

For Brunner the unique revelation in Christ is a Person: "He, this Person, is the true Word. He Himself is the communication of God."[48] And more specifically he writes: "Where God reveals Himself to me in His Word, there it is _not_ a question of 'something.' In His Word, God does not hold a dogma class with me; He does not propose a confession, but He opens to me Himself."[49] In his _Dogmatik_ Brunner's final view on revelation did not change: "The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is _not_ itself a doctrine _(Lehre)_, but a Person with its history."[50]

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[48] Joseph J. Smith, "Emil Brunner's Theology of Revelation," _Heythrop Journal_, 6 (1965), p. 13, citing _Wahrheit_ . . ., p. 82.

[49] _Ibid_., citing _Wahrheit_ . . . , p. 62.

[50] _Ibid_., citing _Dogmatik_, I, 40 Brunner's idea of history went through an evolution. Smith writes (p. 11): "Like all theologians who originally formed the so-called dialectical school, Brunner was at first mainly preoccupied with safeguarding the transcendence of this revelation in Christ from all historical pantheism. In this early reaction to historicism which he saw ascribing a revelatory character to history as such, Brunner so emphasized revelation as an inextended act of God, irrupting into history from above at an inextended point in history, that he obscured the fact that the historical life of Jesus is a necessary element of the revelation. . . . Althaus criticized him . . . and Brunner recognized the justice of the criticism (_Offenbarung_ . . ., 280). . . . Today he sees that in the history of Jesus divine revelation is not relativized by history, but that the history is here absolutized by the divine revelation, by union with the Word. ' . . . How can the relative receive an absolute meaning? It can not receive it, but it has it because and wherever it is, at one and the same time, relative-human-temporal-terrestial and also divine-absolute, the presence of God, eternity in time, heaven on earth (_Das Ewige als Zukunft und Gegenwart_, 44)'" Our question is: may not doctrine (as historical-temporal expression) be similarly 'absolutized by the divine revelation' at least in its core truth?

The question we have seen coming now presents itself: "What is the relation between doctrine [theology] and personal revelation in the revelation in Jesus Christ?"[51] Brunner expresses the question in terms of a 'dialectic' (Tillich prefers 'paradox') in two statements. (1) "Because he, himself, is the Word of God, all words have [only] an instrumental meaning. Neither the spoken word, nor its concepual content is the thing (Sache) itself, but its 'frame,' its container, and its instrument."[52] (2) "The frame is necessarily bound up with its content. Without the doctrine, the thing itself is not present for us. 'God tells us something in order to be present as the Lord and the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit.'"[53] Thus doctrine is inextricably bound up with Jesus Christ, the personal revelation, but Brunner consistently refuses to call doctrine 'revelation:' "We know that we can never have the one without the other, and we know that the important thing is to have this one in this other. Certainly the doctrine is related to the Word of God as sign and container . . ."[54]

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[51] Ibid., p. 13 (brackets ours).

[52] Ibid., citing Wahrheit . . ., p. 82.

[53] Ibid., citing Wahrheit . . ., p. 83.

[54] Ibid., citing Wahrheit . . ., p. 83.

On this point we will see that Barth goes further. At the moment of the revelational-meeting or 'the event,' he would say that the doctrinal container 'becomes' the Word of God. Concerning Scripture as the Word, however, there is an ambivalence in Brunner, such that he seems to come over to and even surpass Barth's position. This we will now investigate.

Brunner on the Scriptures and Biblical Authority

Brunner, like Barth, warns "that the Scriptures are not the absolute norm, nor are they to be simply identified with the Word of God."[55] Jesus Christ, the Word of revelation itself, is the absolute norm. Scripture is conditioned and relative as a medium although we the believers are unconditionally bound to it as medium. Orthodox Protestantism went too far in identifying the human word of the Bible with God's Word and God's revelation (by its exaggerated inspiration theory). Brunner affirms an inspiration for the apostolic witness in Scripture, "but nowhere does it (Scripture) raise the claim to be inspired *eo ipso* because it is apostolic witness, or in its entire extent and in all its particulars."[56] Rather, Brunner compares Scripture's various apostolic witnesses-to-Christ "to a funnel, every point on whose surface is orientated toward the centre Christ."[57] Every witness does not have the same importance but "the closer a statement is to this point, the closer it is to him who is the real meaning of the Bible, and therefore the more important for the personal encounter in faith."[58]

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[55] *Ibid.*, p. 14. [56] *Ibid.*, p. 15 citing *Dogmatik*, I,36.

[57] *Ibid.*, referring to *Wahrheit . . .*, pp. 85-86.

Concerning the authority of Scripture Brunner's ambivalence appears. Here, unlike the case of doctrine, his teaching goes beyond Barth's in saying that Scripture, as inspired-interpretative-witness to the revelation in Christ, is _in itself_ 'revelation' _in some objective sense_: "there is something 'revealed' or as he (Barth) perhaps would say: _Offenbartheit_ (revealed-ness)."[59] The ambivalence arises in that Brunner, while he admits with Barth that in the final and full sense revelation can only be 'the act-of-God-speaking-to-me-here-and-now-in-the-Bible-through-the present-action-of-the-Holy-Spirit,' still insists that 'this word-of-the-Bible-which-_becomes_-the-Word-of-God-for-me' can only do so because it _already is_ God's word _in some sense_. He compares the relationship of Bible with revelation to a phonograph record. The musical message (revelation) can be produced from it _again_ and again:

> It (the Bible) is a "record"; an act that has become a substance. It is fixed and unchangeable; it is a portion of the world; it is available for everyone, even though its aspect as revelation

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[58] _Ibid._, referring to _Wahrheit_ . . ., pp. 85-86.

[59] _Ibid._, p. 16 citing _Natur und Gnade_, p. 35.

> (Offenbarungssein) is not at everyone's disposal. That which is at everyone's disposal, i.e. the bible-book with its fixed meaning, is that which God uses in order to say His personal Word to me today.[60]

In his final phase (Dogmatik, III, 1960) Smith says that Brunner again places the emphasis on God's Word as 'present event to the believer' in agreement with Barth:

> Only God's communication of Himself to me is God's Word. God does not teach us 'about' this and that. He opens Himself to me and by that fact also makes me open to Him. That is the meaning of the 'Word of God' as it meets me in the bible. It is an 'I-Thou' Word. It does not allow itself to be universalized or objectivized. God's Word is no 'something.' no objective 'in itself,' but it is a transitive event, a promise and a claim. The bible is not 'in itself' the Word of God. . . . The word of the bible only becomes God's Word, when God Himself speaks to us.[61]

Smith's own conclusion on Brunner's ambivalence is as much as anyone can say:

> He has not repudiated his former position explicitly. But neither has he repealed it in his most recent clarification in his Dogmatik (III). It could be that while still admitting that the Bible is in a 'certain objective sense' the Word of God, he finds it embarassing with his theory of inspiration to explain this 'certain objective sense' in a more accurate manner. He would prefer therefore to insist more on the other aspect of his doctrine: that the Scripture does not become the Word of God for me in the full sense, except when God himself by the Holy Spirit makes me certain of his immediate presence and permits me to hear his 'Thou'-word, so that it meets me here and now in a completely personal manner.[62]

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[60] Ibid., citing Natur und Gnade, p. 35.

[61] Ibid., pp. 16-17 citing Dogmatik, III, 274, 281.

[62] Ibid., p. 17 referring to Dogmatik, III, 274.

Our own comment is to simply keep recalling the 'reciprocity' principle in the 'one total process of revelation-faith.' We may distinguish the elements but to separate them is to call in theological disaster. This leads to the next level of witness, 'proclamation,' and so to the 'understanding of faith' or 'theology' which it implies.

Brunner on Theology and Proclamation

The revelation in Christ and in the Scriptures is transmitted to men of all ages through the proclamation of the 'Community of the Spirit' (the Church). Because Jesus Christ is the *living* Lord of his Church "his revelation is a *living* present event in the Church and through the Church."[63] This preaching becomes *living* revelation whenever God wills to vitalize it with his Spirit. Brunner doesn't restrict preaching (*Verkündigung*) to sermons, but extends it to all ways of carrying gospel-life to future ages. In fact under this broadened sense of 'proclamation' he gathers the whole meaning of the Church: "Everything which serves this proclamation *is* church, and it is nothing else than this function which makes church to be church: preaching-existence as the historical *continuum* of the revelation."[64] The collection of this preaching gives us that 'genuine tradition' which is "the continuum that binds the unique, historical revelation in Christ with the present which mirrors the preaching of the apostles and the life of the original Ekklesia as recorded in the biblical canon."[65]

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[63] *Ibid*. citing Offenbarung . . ., p. 135.

[64] *Ibid*. citing *Dogmatik*, III, 17, cf. 59.

Implied in this broad sense of proclamation or of 'preaching-existence,' and especially in its 'genuine tradition,' must be a theological-reflection-process with its variant levels of doctrine. Brunner is again of one mind with Barth in aligning this theology-process under faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Unlike Barth however, for Brunner theology (*Lehre*) holds an *inferior* place to 'preaching.' Preaching is "making the word of the Bible to be present reality."[66] Because of the 'existential' and 'direct-address' character of preaching it aims at conversion rather than informing. This does not deny for Brunner the need for systematic theology. The Church must penetrate ever more deeply into the implications of Biblical revelation. He defines dogmatics as "the self-reflection of the Christian community concerning the ground, meaning and content of the message with which it is vested and commissioned."[67] It is not simply thought about the faith, but 'believing-thought.' The outer-rim of the church's self-reflection about the meaning and content of its message is apologetics. It has the double-sided task involved in the German word Auseinandersetzung.[68] It is a missionary theology for a missionary church.

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[65] *Ibid*. referring to *Dogmatik*, 160, pp. 18-19.

[66] Jewett, *op. cit*., p. 123 citing *Offenbarung* . . ., p. 139.

[67] *Dogmatik*, I, from the Foreword.

Having reached this point of Brunner's theology of revelation we turn now to Barth's theology-of-the-Word which complements Brunner's and gives further background for the 1967 Confession. This will be especially true concerning Barth's theology of theology or of 'doctrine' where we have found Brunner somewhat ambivalent with regard to its ability to really become part of the revelation-event.

BARTH

Word of God

Barth saw three levels of meaning in the Word of God and consequently he had a triple-criterion for revelation. These three levels imaged the Trinity. There was the Word of God (1) incarnate in Christ as revealing the Father, (2) written in the Bible as witnessing to Christ the Son, and (3) proclaimed in the sermon by the power of the Spirit. The actual development of Barth's theology of the Word came about in inverse order. His reflections began with the Word in the sermon as he tells us:

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[68] E. Brunner, "Die andere Aufgabe der Theologie," Zwischen den Zeiten, 7 (1929), p. 260.

> When Sunday morning comes with the ringing of the bells there is an atmosphere of expectation. The preacher is in the pulpit . . . The people . . . feel a need, so does the preacher. And the Bible is silent. This is an impossible situation. It is overcome in the absolutely new event in which death becomes life, eternity time, and God man. Revelation must take place and faith must respond. But how can revelation take place? As proclamation of God's Word? If so, what does this mean for the sermon? How does God's Word enter into the realm of man?[69]

The answer lies in Barth's theology of preaching.

Preaching and Theology

Barth gives preaching and theology a vital place in the church but he relates them much more closely than Brunner does, and gives no priority to preaching over theology. To Brunner Barth adds the vision of theology as the church's 'confessional-duty' in the service of future proclamation. Whereas he might agree with Brunner's primacy given to proclamation as the 'direct address' of the revelational process, theology itself he places in the middle between the faith and the speech of the community-of-the-Spirit and in this sense it hold a place of equal importance. "In the area between the faith of the community and its speech a problem arises," Barth wrote. "What is the proper understanding about this Word, the proper way to speak of it? Is the community in a position to render its secondary testimony (witness) responsibly?"[70] In his commentary Johnson sheds light on Barth's answer to the preaching-theology interrelationship. The theologian stands 'in the middle' between Bible and church, biblical and practical theology, Scripture and proclamation, or explicatio and applicatio. Barth calls this the 'razor's edge' upon which dogmatics is balanced, the demarcation line between hearing and teaching, exegesis and preaching. Thus the theologian and preacher stand side by side as do their obligations, theological-reflection and kerygmatic-proclamation. In fact these functions and obligations exist in each Christian. Barth insists always on their distinction--preaching coming from the 'divine mandate to the Church,' theology from the secondary fact of preaching's need for fallible human work. "The preacher and the theologian are inextricably bound up with one another," concludes Johnson, "in such a way that each becomes impotent without the other."[71] In fact such is the importance of the theological task that the kerygmatic witness of the individual Christian becomes impotent without it. Now we must see how Barth describes this task and how he divides its obligation.

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[69] Frederick L. Herzog, "Theologian of the Word," Theology Today, 13 (1956-57), p. 318.

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[70] Karl Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, trans. by Grover Foley (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963), p. 38. The book consists of the Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures of 1962 given at Princeton Theological Seminary.

[71] Johnson, op. cit., p. 166 citing C.D., I/1, pp. 84-85; I/2, pp. 800-801 and 853-854.

Theology, the Church, and Tradition

The theological task, fides quaerens intellectum, primarily is the duty and risk of the entire Church; secondarily and in a special way it is the duty of the official preaching-teaching body. The quest comes from the Word of God who founds the community and its faith. No positive answer can be taken for granted. Preaching and theology are human works. The community can go astray in its interpretation of the Scriptures, in its proclamation of the word, and in its faith. In this sense theology can obstruct God's cause and the community must pray daily that this be not the case. Such is the theological task; there is no other way. Its responsibility falls to the entire community and to each individual Christian. Every Christian as such is called to be a theologian. It is a tragedy when people say 'leave that to the theologians.' "A community awake and conscious of its commission," writes Johnson, "will of necessity be a theologically interested community, . . . especially those members who are commissioned."[72]

In what has been said so far lies latent the 'crucial issue' dividing Christianity. Is the 'community of the Spirit' at every moment fallible and defectible--even in its 'moment of faith?' Or if not; when, where, and how is it indefectible and infallible? For now the question is simply posed. Barth's approach lies somewhere between the dynamism of the semper reformanda and a basic trust which he urges: ". . . trust instead of mistrust will be the initial attitude of theology toward the tradition which determines the present day Church."[73] The infallibility question will come up again shortly. Now we return to Barth's comments on the role of the church in theology.

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[72] Ibid., pp. 38-41.

Since for Barth theology is always *church*-theology it must concern itself with the question of tradition. Like Brunner, Barth gives 'genuine tradition' an important function. Tradition determines proclamation. Theology has to be constantly tested and rethought in the light of its 'enduring foundation' and of its content. "Theology itself must be rooted in the community of yesterday;" Johnson notes, "its testimony to the Word and the profession of its faith must originate, like the community itself, from the community of past times, from the older and the more recent *tradition* which determines the present form of its witness."[74] The content of the 'enduring foundation' was itself originated from and formed by the Church's theological process: the confess-ing of a tradition by the early Church in fulfillment of her own *fides quaerens intellectum*. The *kerygmatic* gospel evolved into a *dogmatic* gospel and thence into a new-always-old kerygma. The process continued in the growing church and it must continue today in the *living* Church.

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[73] *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Theology and History: the Canon Problem

Of special note in Barth's epistemology of faith is the relationship between faith and Christian-history. This begins with the recording of Scripture. Barth presumes the overall 'historical-veracity' of the 'canon.' This presupposition is fundamental for his remaining theological process. Subsequent encounters with history and reason however do not have nearly such a veracity-guarantee. This hesitancy to rely on any human-historical-grounding for the faith process points up his two absolute principles: (1) the absolute sovereignty and freedom of the Word of God, and (2) the *semper reformanda* principle conjoined with the theology of man's fall and ruling out any permanent guarantee of human-historical truth (at least in itself).[75] In the first is his strength; in the second his problems. In strict loyalty to Protestant tradition Barth consistently refuses even a 'relative divinization' to the human media involved in the revelation process: whether it be to a natural-theology-apologetic or any apologetic, or whether it be to human-theological-formulation including a confession of faith. At least he does not spell-out theologically what happens to these human-media when 'in the moment of faith they become the Word of God.'

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[75] Tied in at this point are many fundamentals. Is all en-spiriting grace merely an extrinsic denomination? May it not continue the unitive reality of the Incarnation by actually conjoining man's humanity with Christ's humanity. Then there would be a 'new being' and a 'new creation' which, while still imperfect and pilgrim, would nevertheless have an intrinsically-healed power orientated to 'truth' (human and divine). Simply stated: is it not time to rethink the Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinist *'massa corrupta'* and permit theological evolution here as it had taken place with regard to the Decrees. This does not deny the possibility of human error or sinfulness. Rather it mitigates the doctrine of the absolute impossibility of human truth and goodness and of a faith consisting merely in an 'extrinsic denomination.' It must also bring the guarantee that Christian faith will never be confused with or exchanged with human rational certitude (even such as 'the church says so' or 'Scripture says so').

The key to Barth's 'theology of theology' lies in his own comments on the 'canon problem.' The Church's first theological problem teaches us the method for all her theology. He explains what he means by presupposition:

> A further presupposition was that we know which scriptures must be read as "holy" Scripture and acknowledged as the theological norm. In fact we do know this, for theology is a service in and for the community and springs from the tradition of the community. In this matter theology clings to that confession which is perhaps the most important of all church confessions, i.e., it clings to the selection of the various writings that confirmed themselves to the community as genuinely prophetic and apostolic witnesses. It was this selection that was unanimously accepted by the community of the late fourth century. The character of these writings as . . . witnesses is what the fathers of those days recognized and confessed by faith in God's Word, whose image and echo they perceived in them. To this confession the community of every succeeding century has committed itself.
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> . . . It is just this traditional canon which theology must first of all simply risk as a working hypothesis for the decisive reason that it cannot refuse to join in that age-old act of faith if it is to be service in and for the community.
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> The precise task of theology is credo ut intelligam . . . to grasp and understand . . . the extent to which the cannonical collection acknowledged by earlier generations actually is the canon of Holy Scripture. But how other than

> through knowledge of the content . . . than by activating that working hypothesis? . . . than by engaging in the exegetical circle that is unavoidable if those texts are to be understood? This *investigation* does not consist in anticipation but in expectation of an event, an event in which the authority of these texts announces itself. In this way theology sees, understands, and knows that the search for authentic witness to God's Word is fruitful only if pursued in the original canon . . .[76]

Two phrases from the next-to-last sentence contain the essential theological elements: (1) investigation and (2) expectation of an event. The former refers to the human process of historical-reasoning; the latter to the 'faith process' when the Word of God through his Spirit brings it about that the 'witness' becomes the Word of God. There is an absolute need for distinguishing the two processes in order to guarantee the sovereign freedom of the revealing word. This Barth carefully does. Once this is guaranteed, however, the question may be asked of him: what value can be attributed to the 'human investigation' and to the 'genuine historical tradition?' It has been the mark of the 'more recent' Barth to give a high position to investigation and historical church tradition in the faith process.[77] Herein he may have surpassed Brunner to whom he had said an emphatic No! in reference to Brunner's Christian natural-theology. Our final comment is to note once again how tenaciously Barth refuses to allow the inseparable reciprocal-elements of the theological norm (bible, church, and reason under the Spirit) to be separated. If Barth at times seems unwilling to unite the reciprocal elements to the divine as closely as we would want him to at least there is strong common ground in the insistence on their inseparability.

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[76] *Ibid*., p. 44.

[77] In 1950 (*C.D*. III/3, pp. 58-59) Barth is willing to admit a manifestation of God in creation which only the believer can perceive. With this opening to at least a Christian natural-theology there could follow a greater openness to reason-under-grace in general, and thence to the apologetic aspect (reasonableness and credibility) of all kerygmatic and systematic theology (which Brunner said was 'necessary for a missiological theology').

Theology and Truth

The same problem arises for contemporary theology as for the canon. Within faith can contemporary church theology or tradition ever make the claim that 'this' or 'that' is a true doctrinal interpretation or development of the gospel-revelation? Another way of asking the question would be: after the recording of Scripture can there ever be a recorded theological-tradition which as witness to revelation should be called 'holy' and 'true'? Or must we remain ever restless in our faith and so fearful of error that we may never claim the truth?

There seems no doubt that Barth's position remains loyal to the third Protestant principle (in addition to divine sovereignty and semper reformanda): the denial of the Roman Catholic interpretation of an infallible-Church and church-tradition. This is a corrollary of the semper reformanda principle whereby theology must be an ever dynamic and restless process. Johnson describes Barth's struggle with this 'truth' problem:

> Theology takes its rise from the intrinsic 'unrest' that is an inescapable part of the existence of the church within history, because of its human, all-too-human side. This restlessness is born of the deepest concern of the church, the concern that man's words about God shall in fact become and be the Word of God. Thus . . . it prohibits the church from in any way acquiescing in the ambiguity of its language about God, and drives it day by day to theological reflection and labor. It is this concern which designates the subject matter to which theology must turn its attention, namely the "totality of what it hears from the church, the actual, contemporary church, as its human speech about God."[78]

In no way then can theology be asserted to be a summary recitation of 'propositional truths of revelation.' A theological system can never be 'final;' every day the theologian must answer anew his call to obedience (faith). His function and its material is always dynamic: 'to test the church's speech in order to discern its capability of serving the Word.' Barth's all embracing regulatory presupposition is that 'God is known through God alone,' so that 'revelation has its truth' only in the free decision of God. "It is because . . . success is possible only as the church stands under justifying grace as it reflects theologically," says Johnson,

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[78] Johnson, op. cit., p. 167 citing C.D., I/2, p. 778.

"that Barth describes theology as an 'event' and an 'act of faith.'"[79] This cuts Barth's principle of authority free from any indentification with a summary recitation of given propositional 'truths of revelation.' This leaves the question: if not identified with revelation, then what is the witnessing-role of propositional truths in Barth's theology of revelation? Is the cutting-free a completely total thing?

Barth's Meaning of 'Meaning' and of Truth

Barth, like Brunner, has a limited meaning for 'truth' or for 'meaning' in the revelational process. He appears to circumscribe the ambiance of 'truth' to one existential point, his 'event point' corresponding to Brunner's 'encounter point.' This protects God's sovereignty but it could be asked if it doesn't overprotect it. Doesn't man's imaging of God demand that he share not only his ability to 'be encounter-ed' but also God's ability to understand 'meaning' or 'truth'? Thus Barth like Brunner seems to be ambivalent about the place of 'truth content' and 'meaning' in revelation when it goes beyond the one 'existential point.' "The quest of theology is for truth . . . understood not as 'correct' but as 'pure doctrine' [reine Lehre]," explains Johnson, "and pure doctrine is an 'event.' It is human language about God made transparent to the Word of God by the action of God."[80] Granting the existential 'faith-event' characteristic of 'faith-truth' as essential and even central, the Barthian ambivalence seems to want more and yet not want more. There does seem to be a 'content' to the gospel which, however mysterious and incomprehensible, speaks through language and symbols that do have some basic comprehension. Barth does not want a 'docetic revelation.' Johnson again explains:

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[79] Ibid., pp. 168-69 citing C.D., I/2, p. 781, I/1, p. 16 and II/1, pp. 3-254.

> . . . the Bible, even as it becomes 'from time to time the Word of God in and for the church, is a thoroughly human document. "Where the Word of God is an event, revelation and the Bible are in fact one." . . . As with Christ, it is in the humanity of the Scripture that we find its divinity and nowhere else . . . No Docetic compromise can be tolerated in Christology. . . .[81]

Here, it is clear, that at least at the 'faith-moment' the 'incarnational-principle' is operative.

The ultimate Barthian epistemology of 'truth-content' in the revelation-process grounds itself in and only in God's justifying grace. In the first part of his second volume (II/1) he gives his definitive epistemological principle. It is firmly built upon the inability of man's fallen intellect to posit any truth of God built upon human analogy. And yet he is equally insistent that somehow God's truth is communicated. The obvious question is 'how.' First we must hear Barth:

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[80] Ibid., pp. 169-70 citing I/2, pp. 855, 768, 758-82 (italics ours).

[81] Ibid., p. 186 referring to I/2, pp. 497-502; 542-44.

> The activity involved in our knowledge of His creation, to be realized in views, concepts and words, has its truth, hidden from us, in God as its and our Creator. In the first instance, whatever is said by us was, is and will be said truly in Him . . . in a truth which is original, primary, independent and proper truth; by us in a truth which is subsequent, secondary, dependent and improper. It will be said *in Him infallibly*, by us (for we are not only creatures but sinful creatures who have fallen from Him) *always in error*, and yet in such a way that even in error, doubly hidden from ourselves (by our creatureliness and our sin), and therefore in a double sense without any possibility of reclamation, we live by *His infallible truth*. With our views, concepts and words we have no claim on Him, that He should be their object. He Himself, however, has every claim on us and on all our views, concepts and words, that He should be their first and last and proper subject. Therefore, He does not annul His truth or deny it, nor does He establish a double truth, nor does He place us in the doubtful position of an "as if" cognition, when He allows and commands us in His revelation to make use of our views, concepts, and thoughts to describe Himself, His Word, and His deeds. On the contrary, *He establishes the one truth, His* own, *as the truth of our views*, concepts, and words.
>
> . . . Our words are not our property, but His. And disposing of them as His property, He places them at our disposal--at the disposal of our grateful obedience--when He allows and commands us to make use of them in this relationship too . . .[82]

We are 'always in error' and yet 'we live by His infallible truth.' He does not place us in a doubtful 'as-if' position, but establishes His own truth as the truth of our views, concepts, and words.' But how? Not by 'some violent miracle'

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[82] *C.D.*, II/1, 27, 2 (Bromiley-Torrance ed.), pp. 228-29 (italics ours).

Barth claims. Rather he says: "God exercises a lawful claim and makes a restitution, when, in his omnipotence, He causes the *miracle to happen by which we come to participate in the veracity of His revelation* and by which *our words become true descriptions of Himself*."[83]

One last step remains. What is Barth's explanation of this 'participated veracity?' This non-violent, yet miraculous, guidance consists in the *spiratio* or *in-spiratio* of the Holy Spirit which he gives to the community bearing his name and his presence. In one of his latest explanations Barth explains:

> . . . A community arose, the Church, destined and commissioned to proclaim the work and word of God in the world. What is the *power* of their existence and action?
>
> . . . Theology hovers in mid-air, it depends actually upon God's *living* Word, in God's chosen eyewitnesses, and *in the existence of God's people* in the world . . .
>
> . . . This *is* the *power present* and *active* in *what the affirmations of theology declare*, in the history of salvation and revelation, in the hearing and speech of the biblical witnesses, in the being and act of the community summoned by them, and also in the work of theology when it testifies to these things. But *this power is* also *totally superior to theology itself*. It sustains and activates the whole (revelational) event from the history of Immanuel down to the little tale in whose telling theology has its existence and activity. In the telling that hidden power *prevents and forbids the slightest attempt* to construct *treacherous presuppositions*. The theologian does not have it in his control. While

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[83] *Ibid.*, p. 229 (italics ours).

> he lets his thought and speech be controlled by it, he gladly renounces the temptation to exert control over it. All this . . . (is) in the realm of the divine _spiratio_ and _inspiratio_, the effective powers by which God discloses himself freely to men . . .
>
> . . . Only in the courageous confidence that the _Spirit is the truth_ does theology simultaneously pose and answer the question about truth.[84]

Thus for Barth the divine truth, infallibility, and authority of the revelation-faith event are shared by virtue of the Spirit's power and in-spiratio with man. In man they are only mediate and derivative and cannot properly be said to remain permanently in the human instrument independently of the moment of in-spiratio and revelation. In this sense and because every believer-theologian may at times be 'lacking' or 'struggling-against' or 'mis-interpreting' the truth-giving-inspiratio, Barth says that all 'tradition' and 'propositional summary' of revelation--including the Bible itself--are _in themselves_ not yet infallible, and so _fallible_. Given this explanation of truth and infallibility in faith we have much common ground between neo-orthodox and Roman Catholic theology. For both, the 'moment of truth' lies in the 'moment of faith' (obedience, responseful assent), and this can never be _separated_ from the 'moment of the Spirit.' The infallibility is always interpersonal; it is primarily attributable to people (to God and to men as believers). It has also been secondarily attributed to historical witnesses (Scripture, major doctrinal confessions, etc.) but always as at most a mediate, derived power which depends on the Spirit and the interpersonal event. Their infallibility and authority are potentialities awaiting the divine actualization in the faith moment. There is truly a permanent 'witness-value' to these instruments but their witness is actualized only in the I-Thou encounter of revelation-faith. Finally what is only potentially infallible must be in itself potentially fallible. This is so at least in the sense that the moment of inspiratio is beyond man's control, it can be refused, and it can be received in different degrees. This leads us to the necessity of doubt amid our search in faith, for doubt becomes that human moment of open-expectancy and helpless awaiting for the divine moment.

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[84] Barth, _Evangelical Theology_, pp. 49-55 (brackets and italics ours).

Faith and Doubt in Theology

Because the 'moment of faith' is not our own to give, and because there may be sinful selfishness, misinterpretations, and misleadings in the theological search (*fides quaerens intellectum*), we may have what Barth has called "unspiritual theology." Whether in the pulpit, on the printed page, or in discussions, the Spirit departs when he discovers theology is stagnant. Barth singles out two instances:[85] (1) when theology refuses to submit and to be led by the Spirit; and (2) when theology forgets that the wind of the Spirit blows where it wills but presumes to have things under its own control. Because of this potential sinfulness or untimeliness every Christian theologian as well as the entire Community of the Spirit must stand open to the radical possibility of at least temporary error. Consequently they must work out their faith in prayerful-doubt. It is the vocation of every Christian to struggle with this uncertainty as he awaits always the 'new moment' of God's Word. This search comprises the positive part of the semper reformanda for Barth. "Theology," he writes, "must constantly inquire anew into the content of the revelation . . . It must repeatedly discover afresh the truth and reality of this action and the significance of the divine statement made by it."[86]

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[85] See *ibid*., pp. 56-57.

Concluding Questions for Barth

Presuming the formentioned 'common-ground,' especially the existence of subjective fallibility and the need for constant reform, it may still be asked of Barth whether there might not be some sort of permanency, continuity, and irreformability in the progressive understanding of revelation--and this in its humanly recorded propositional statements. And if there could be this derived-authoritative-permanency or irreformability for certain truths of faith and a mediate infallibility for believers to discern these truths, what community structure and functions would help support the process? How, by whom, and when can the community of the Spirit definitively discern which truths or 'confessions' are from the Spirit? The question can be phrased another way: in addition to Holy Scriptures might not the traces and 'historical recordings' of the Holy Spirit's visitations permanently maintain their potential as human-historical means for further en-Spirited witnessing to the living Word and to the gospel-truth of Christ? And since a special 'inspiratio' or charism was needed for the early church to discern and record in a 'definitive declaration' (Scripture) the faith and gospel of the apostolic-witness and to discern its subsequent growth or development, might not such a discerning-charism be present in today's living Church for interpreting the Church's living tradition and for even further developing its implicates, and finally for definitively recording its confession of faith such that it might be offered (not imposed!) in the presence of the Spirit to all members of the Community for their prayerful consideration as a response to their 'searching-faith?' Whomsoever the Spirit inspired could freely accept and participate in the communal confession of faith--whensoever the inspiration was offered. Would not such a process respect not only the Spirit's sovereign freedom to encounter the individual believer but also the individual's free decision and discernment 'to be encountered?' Can there be any other way except this en-Spirited-communal way to insure the continuation of the gospel-faith? Can there be true development without some doctrinal-permanency (irreformability) or without some continuing power to discern infallibly the true-faith from the non-true?

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[86] Ibid., p. 121.

One could finally ask Barth: would it be entirely beyond Protestant theology to conceive of a special charism for a teaching-office in the Community of the Spirit, which observing the safeguards of divine and human freedom and of the 'semper reformanda' would empower this body in cooperation with the entire Church to discern, confess, and definitively declare and record a development-in-doctrine to be offered to all members for prayerful reflection and confession (should the Spirit so enlighten them)? It seems that, if Roman Catholic doctrine has overemphasized this 'defining and declaring' power of the revelational-traditioning process often to the neglect of the other necessary constituents, Protestant thought, while insisting on due emphasis for the other constituents, has shied away from the in-spiratio for the defining-declaring process. One reason is that the 'whole Christian Church' is simply at the beginning of its doctrinal-development in this area. The recent articulation of the entire complexus of reciprocal interrelationships involved in the revelational-traditioning process is a good start. More will be said on these reciprocal elements in our concluding reflections. Our conclusion for now is that such questions arise inherently from the Protestant neo-orthodox development and that such theological-reflections are the best apologetic for deepening one's understanding of faith.

INFLUENCE OF BARTH AND BRUNNER
ON AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN THOUGHT

General Resumé

Barth and Brunner share a common influence on twentieth century American Presbyterian theologians. In our specific area of epistemology of faith their differences are negligible--even on the Barth-Brunner 'point of contact' dispute.[87] As far as the 1967 Confession is concerned we will see that most of the theologians assigned to the original Committee of Fifteen were influenced by the neo-orthodox approach to revelation. Their commentaries on Barth and/or Brunner are favorable especially toward the strong Barth-Brunner anti-bibliolatry. The Committee chairman, Edward Dowey, did his Doctoral thesis under Brunner at Zürich.

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[87] Barth speaks of the need for constantly updating theology (ibid., pp. 46-47): "Time and again, the community grows used to living from what was said in it and to it yesterday . . . In the meantime, it is to be hoped, theology has advanced somewhat further, and what . . . it ventures to think and say today, will only seldom agree completely with what the fathers of yesterday thought and said."

The Barth-Brunner Anti-Bibliolatry

"It would . . . be an inadequate faith," writes Barth, "if someone were to assent to certain propositions and doctrines on the basis of their own authority . . . or even through the Bible."[88] "This is the procedure," he continues, "which Wilhelm Hermann untiringly pilloried at the beginning of our century as the most unpardonable of all sins . . . a wretched retreat from the quest for truth."[89] "We do not believe," writes Brunner in his turn, "that Jesus is the Christ _because_ the apostles (or Scripture) says so. However, _without_ their witness we could not know it."[90] In a single act of revelation Brunner claims we know both that Christ is truly the one the apostle testifies him to be and that the apostle is a faithful witness. In the act of faith the 'historical' in the Scriptures becomes an 'other than historical;' it becomes the eternal Word of God. "And thus the only sufficient ground of faith," Brunner says, "is the authority of God Himself as He addresses me in His Word . . . I believe the Word of God because it is the Word of _God_ which He Himself addresses to me in the crisis of faith."[91] The following summary by Brunner could be taken as a synopsis of the biblical-authority doctrine of the 1967 Confession:

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[88] _Ibid_., p. 98. [89] _Ibid_.

[90] Jewett, _op. cit_., p. 128 citing Brunner, _Die Christliche Lehre von Schöpfung und Erlösung_, p. 307.

[91] _Ibid_., pp. 135-36 citing _Offenbarung_ . . ., p. 166; and _Die Christliche Lehre_ . . . , p. 307.

> Jesus Christ is Himself the Word of God. Therefore to say that the Bible is God's Word in the Orthodox sense is idolatry. The Bible is not the ground of Christian faith, but its means. I do believe that Jesus is the Christ because I believe in the Bible . . .
>
> It was the genius of Luther, having broken the shackles of Romish heteronomy, not to become enslaved to a paper pope.[92]

Brunner breaks the bibliolatry-papolatry disjunction by viewing the Scriptures as the indispensable means of faith.

Dowey and the Neo Orthodox Theologians

It was especially in Dowey and Hendry that we have already heard echoes of the Barth-Brunner doctrine on authority. In fact Dowey's study in Calvin and his exercise in comparative-symbolics with the early Reformed creeds showed us the early sources for the neo-orthodox re-discovery. "The Bible," Dowey concluded, "is seen as an instrument of revelation under the guidance of the Spirit in the living Church."[93] He pointed out that the early Reformers gave distinctive emphasis to revelation and to its faith-response and that their primary concern was with the preaching and hearing of the gospel of Christ, not with the Bible as such. He claimed that it was in the Lutheran 'gospel versus law' distinction and in Calvin's reciprocity between 'Word and Spirit' that we have the 'ground' for the neo-orthodox emphasis away from the Bible. He showed that in the Scots Confession "the concept of faith in the redeeming promise . . . is stated prior to all concern for the question of a formal-authority for doctrine."[94] The concept of faith he added was kept to the forefront by the emphasis given to the doctrines of the Spirit and the Church.[95] In the Second Helvetic[96] Dowey found a change of emphasis compared to the First Helvetic giving a larger role to the revelation in the believer as opposed to the inspired Bible and placing major emphasis on revelation in the Church via preaching. The Heidelberg Catechism[97] was compared favorably to the Scots confession, and the Westminster literature was compared unfavorably to all of them as allowing the biblical-authority motif to exert a centripetal force on all else. This meant that the epistemological problem was "disposed of, not under the concept of faith, . . . but in terms of canon and text."[98] Although we have no footnotes alluding to Barthian-Brunnerian doctrine the similarities stand for themselves. In his debate with the "Chicago Committee" opponents to the proposed 1967 Confession (details shortly) Dowey explained the revision on biblical authority: "It is a shift away from the peculiar emphasis of Westminster that rested everything on how the Bible was written ('inspiration') to an emphasis on what God reveals through the Bible ('revelation')."[99] Dowey presses the point further:

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[92] Ibid., pp. 127-28 citing Offenbarung . . ., p. 166.

[93] Dowey, art. cit. (Seminar paper), p. 17.

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[94] Ibid., p. 11.   [95] See ibid.

[96] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[97] Ibid., p. 12 (brackets and italics ours).

[98] Ibid., p. 15.

> Westminster calls the Bible the Word of God twenty-odd times, but it does not call Jesus Christ the Word even once.
>
> . . . What is the intention of the proposed Confession? To return to the center, Christ the Word, "the Word contained in these books" as the old Genevan Confession puts it.[100]

This emphasis on the Bible as means and witness to 'the revelation' (Christ) is the central theme of the neo-orthodox evangelical theology. In proposing the new subscription formula there is an explicit reference made by the Committee to 'the new theology of revelation': "to take advantage of the remarkable advances in the doctrine of revelation in the twentieth century the Committee proposes a reformulation more in agreement with the new statement of faith."[101]

Dowey's personal theological reflections on Barth and Brunner add some further insights. Comparing Barth and Tillich Dowey says that they started with the same problem of theology: the integration of the biblical-norm with the Church's past and present, but arrived at quite opposite conclusions. "Tillich's method of correlation," Dowey contends, "must not become the central theological method. The only criterion of Christian theology, finally, is Barth's Jesus the Christ, as event and un-'translated.'"[102] He agrees with Barth (I/1, 98) that the Bible is by no means of itself a medium for the Word of God but only in the concrete event of revelation.

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[99] "Questions and Answers on the Confession of 1967," Presbyterian Life, (Nov. 15, 1965), p. 15.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Report of the Special Committee . . ., p. 42.

Dowey's agreement with Brunner echoes his agreement with Barth. He recognizes the encounter-point as the core of Brunner's theology, defends its, and seems to push it even further. Thus he says that for Brunner 'to speak of Jesus is to speak of his work.' Dowey's main criticism of Brunner in his own words 'goes with rather than across the grain' of Brunner's theology. "The concept of Encounter," Dowey writes, "has really robbed the traditional locus of Christ's 'person' of any raison d'etre as a separate theological topic . . . The next development may well be to take more seriously the union of work and person and give a fully integrated analysis."[103] Dowey correctly sees Brunner's biblical-authority as excluding propositional-truths as extraneous to'encounter' and he sees Brunner's conception of history as personal-encounter 'writ large.' Thus his going with the grain of Brunner would put him in sympathy with the existential-epistemology of the encounter-point. In his own study of Calvin however Dowey seemed to hold a place for 'knowledge' in faith--which we presumed at that time to include 'some objective content.' This topic of 'doctrine' and 'propositional truth' as part of the revelation-faith process will come up in the final arena. No matter what the outcome, it can be said that the 'encounter-truth' (Aquinas would call it the formal-object of faith) must have its primary place in the epistemology of faith.

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[102] Edward A. Dowey, "Tillich, Barth, and Criteria of Theology," Theology Today, 15 (April 1958), pp. 47, 52, 54, 58 citing Barth's Die protestantische Theologie im neuzehnten Jahrhundert, p. 384.

[103] Edward A. Dowey, "Redeemer and Redeemed as Persons in History," The Theology of Emil Brunner, Charles W. Kegley ed. ("The Library of Living Theology," Vol. III., New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 199, 191-92.

Hendry and Neo-Orthodoxy

Like Dowey, Hendry reflects the neo-orthodox emphasis on the functional purpose of the Bible as witness to the revelation. His comment on the 1967 Confession makes this clear. "Attention is here focused on the Bible as means of grace rather than as rule of faith " he explains. " . . . It was in keeping with the central theme . . . the reconciling act of God in Christ, that the emphasis was laid on the function of the Bible in the transmission of the Gospel of reconciliation, and the authority of the Bible was defined in terms of function."[104] In line with Hendry's comment on the functional ('reconciliation') theme of the 1967 Confession is Barth's basic conviction: that God's words are acts. For Barth the message of the Bible was one: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself . . ." (II Cor. 5:19).[105] Another of Hendry's emphases coincides with Barth's own: the importance of preaching. "The apostles were, of course, commissioned to be witnesses by preaching the word," says Hendry, "not by writing books . . . for the word is a word to be preached, first and foremost, and its written form is secondary and instrumental to that end."[106]

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[104] George S. Hendry, "The Bible in the Confession of 1967," The Princeton Seminary Bulletin, 60 (Oct. 1966), p. 21.

Hendry's direct reflections on Barth and Brunner put him solidly in the neo-orthodox tradition--as do his own theological writings. Dowey after describing Brunner's need for integrating the concepts of work and person cited Hendry's The Gospel of the Incarnation as making use of the personal-voluntarist categories with this tendency and as arriving at the conclusion that "the gospel consists 'in the work of His incarnate life.'"[107] In reviewing Brunner's Dogmatics, III, Hendry[108] identifies his favorite 'functional approach' with apparent approbation. He points out that Brunner sees the Spirit's role as the re-presentation of the historical revelation, but that he is critical of the Western preoccupation with the cognitive function of the Spirit and asks for an equal recognition of the Spirit's function as the giver of life. He cites Brunner's connection of the misunderstanding of faith as an assent to doctrine with the misunderstanding of the church as an institution. But then he goes on to point out that Brunner's own attempt at an existential conception of faith was 'left with the old problem: how such a faith could include the doctrinal articles of the creed.' Hendry's conclusion to this dilemna about 'doctrine' is much like Brunner's: we need a new doctrine of Scripture which will take its shape from justifying faith in Christ. But we have seen earlier that Hendry would include a total re-analysis of all the various levels and functions of doctrine. With Barth Hendry shares the neo-orthodox and early-Reform 'absolute' on the sovereign freedom of the Spirit. "Only in the power of the Spirit," Hendry writes, "can theology function as 'a humble, free, critical and happy science of the God of the Gospel.'"[109] The theology of the Spirit leads us to Hendry's unanswered 'doctrinal dilemna': must not the function of the Spirit have its counterpart-effect in humanity--the 'to whom,' and the 'how' of the concrete revelational-traditioning process including his use of doctrine as a secondary witness? Hendry's question joins Dowey's as the content for our final-reflections.

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[105] See Herzog, art. cit., p. 324.

[106] Hendry, art. cit. (n. 104), p. 23 (italics ours).

[107] Dowey, art. cit. (n. 103), p. 204 citing Hendry's The Gospel of the Incarnation, p. 165.

[108] Geroge S. Hendry, "An Appraisal of Brunner's Theology," Theology Today, 19 (Jan. 1963), pp. 523-26 (italics ours).

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[109] George S. Hendry, "Barth for Beginners," Theology Today, 19 (July 1962), p. 271.

Neo-Orthodoxy and Other Theologians of the 1967 Confession

Another member of the Committee of Fifteen, James Smart of Union Theological (New York), we met earlier as the prime author of the 'new curriculum.' His apologia for the 1967 Confession images the neo-orthodox influence already seen in his 'new curriculum.' As with the two preceding Committee-men Smart points out the need for distinguishing the Word of God from the witness in Scripture. The word is divine and the witness is 'so completely human' that of itself it can never reveal God. "The opening sentence . . .," Smart comments, "says what the New Testament says and what the Westminster Confession failed to say: the Word of God is Jesus Christ."[110] Concerning Barth's influence on his own thought we have his own testimony:

> [Barth] opened the Scriptures in such a way that revelation ceased to be merely a concept of theology and became the reality of God's present self-manifestation by which the Church and the Christian in the Church might live . . .
>
> To this was speedily added the conviction that the responsible minister of the Word must also be a critical theologian . . . Theology came back out of the university into the Church.[111]

Calvin DeVries was the representative to the Committee from the pastoral field. His theological perception equals that of his fellow committeemen. The Confession he saw as seeking to affirm the central role of Scripture without confusing revelation with its witness. Preoccupation with inspiration however had focused attention on the words of the Bible and on verbal infallibility. The real infallibility lay rather in God's graciousness. "Our confidence lies not within ourselves and our presumed possession of the 'Word of God,'" he concludes, "but rather that the God who has spoken . . . in Jesus Christ, . . . will continue to speak to us afresh in every generation through that Scripture which witnesses to him."[112] Leonard Trinterud, the Committee historian, joined with those following the neo-orthodox view of revelation. His introductory essay professes his theme: "the church has always to be reformed NOW, in its very own life, by the Word of God made known through the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit."[113] This was also his historical theme concerning colonial Presbyteriansism. In line with Trinterud's thought we have the expert on the 1934 Barmen Declaration, Arthur Cochrane, who affirms a relationship between Barmen and the 1967 Confession. Barth it should be noted had an influential role to play at Barmen. "The 1967 Confession's section on the Bible," notes Cochrane, "is actually an expansion on the Barmen thesis that 'Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death."[114] Two Committeemen resigned and led an opposition-group in favor of emendation, Addison Leitch and D. H. C. Read. Our next chapter will show the struggle and its final outcome. The large majority favored the neo-orthodox revision--some more than others.

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[110] James D. Smart, "Scripture and the Confession of 1967," Theology Today, 23 (April, 1966), pp. 36-37, 39.

[111] James D. Smart, "How Barth has Influenced Me," Theology Today, 13 (1956), p. 371.

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[112] Calvin DeVries, "Is the 1967 Confession Biblical?" McCormick Quarterly 19 (Jan. 1966), pp. 177-79.

[113] Leonard J. Trinterud, "Confessions of the Church: Times and Places," Report of the Special Committee . . . , p. 15.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Summary--John Thomas

The best summary of the Barth-Brunner influence is offered by John Thomas of Richmond's Union Theological. He himself represents the first-wave of American Presbyterian followers of neo-orthodoxy. "Barth's new-found orthodoxy was thus in the main my own and caused no appreciable change in my views except in the doctrine of revelation" he affirms . "His fresh and powerful presentation of revelation (. . . also Emil Brunner) immeasurably increased the scope and importance of revelation as personal encounter . . ."[115] Thomas' article on authority[116] written in 1946 represents to us the changing Presbyterian theology. In its restraint it is closer to the final version of the 1967 Confession than to the original proposal. Barth he said presented a most heartening view to the 'beleagured evangelical' which permitted acceptance of the higher criticism and yet averred with confidence the truth of revelation. William Temple had written in 1937 that 'the dominant problem of religious thought is that of revelation.' Barth's Kirchliche Dogmatik (I/2) develops his early thesis that the Bible is the 'witness to revelation' and that from time to time God 'lets it become his word.' The same attitude was even more clearly presented by Brunner for whom 'revelation is not a doctrine about God but God's own personal Word.'

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[114] Arthur C. Cochrane, "Barmen and the Confession of 1967," McCormick Quarterly, 19 (Jan. 1966), p. 144.

[115] John N. Thomas et. al., "How Barth Has Influenced Me," Theology Today, 13 (1956), p. 368.

Thomas also brings out the objection to the neo-orthodox doctrine, one which has repeatedly arisen since the time of the early Reformers: the danger of a spiritualistic, content-less, and completely mystical revelation. The current theology he says binds revelation to Scripture by an all too tenuous thread. It empties the Bible of all inspired truth. "What the homeless evangelical, standing between verbal inspiration and rationalism, hailed as a saving via media,"

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[116] John N. Thomas, "Authority of the Bible," Theology Today, 3 (1946), pp. 159, 161-162.

Thomas says, "thus turns out, upon analysis, to stop only a few steps short of mysticism."[117] In some respects this made the status of the Bible more precarious than it had been. The problem at anyrate eventually focused on the 'truth-content' of revelation.

Brunner Speaks About Truth-Content in Revelation

Before augmenting the voices of dissent over propositionless-revelation it is worth hearing Brunner himself. The listening might forestall a lis de verbis. Brunner concedes that the phrase 'I believe something' is frequently used. He insists that there can be no question of biblical faith which is *entirely* in the order of I-Thou personal-correspondence. He seems to re-introduce the distinction between 'levels or degrees of faith'--specifically between '*primary*-propositionless-personal faith' and '*secondary*-propositional-doctrinal faith.' The crucial question remains: can the 'secondary' ever be so drawn-up into the 'primary' that they can both be called one-faith? Faith could then be truly said to have a 'something-content.' Brunner in his *Wahrheit als Begegnung* seems to be adamant in his negative reply:

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[117] *Ibid.*, pp. 162-63 citing Temple's *Nature, Man and God*, p. 317.

> Where there is question of genuine primary faith, i.e., where God reveals Himself to me in His Word, He does not hold a dogma class, nor does He explain to me the contents of a confession of faith, but God causes me to think; He communicates to me not "something" but Himself. Das Gegenüber is no longer as in thought, something, . . . considered and discussed, that I myself discover through the energy of my own thought. It is a Person who speaks to me and who discovers Himself to me, who . . . takes over the role that I myself usually have in thinking.[118]

The 'knowledge' of faith differs from all other knowledge. It is a 'strictly personal communication,' communicable only in the second person. Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit the historical point of faith transforms itself into immediate presence: 'I am yours and you are mine.' What then about our human content (language, concepts, propositions, truths, etc.) about God? May this 'knowledge' in any sense be called a part of the revelational-process?

One commentator, Joseph Smith, gives a balanced interpretation of Brunner's reply. Brunner he says does not want to exaggerate. He does not want to say that 'truths' and 'the objective meaning of truth' are not involved in personal faith. In fact he makes them the indispensable instruments, the 'containers and signs of the true content of faith.' "Jesus Christ is the revelation " Smith concludes. "Words and concepts have instrumental importance only. They are containers for the true content of faith. . . . They are necessarily, not accidentally, bound up with the object of faith, Jesus Christ Himself."[119] Brunner speaks to the problem and comes up with the answer that there is a 'sacramental union' between the two:

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[118] Brunner, Wahrheit als Begegnung, p. 57.

> Certainly God does not hold a dogma class with us . . ., but He teaches us authentically about Himself. He tells us Who He is, what He desires for us and from us. And even the most single . . . personal prayer possesses a conceptual and confessional content: Our Father, Who art in heaven. Therefore we can never separate the conceptual form from the personal presence contained in the form. But we must clearly distinguish them . . .
>
> In other words, it is true that faith is, ultimately, not a "thinking about something" but a personal encounter, trust, obedience, and love. But this personal event is inseparably united with a conceptual content which can be the object of thought, with truth in the ordinary sense . . . as the perception of an object or fact. God only says and gives Himself to us in such a way that He tells us something, namely the truth about Himself. And we can only enter into communion . . ., and . . . surrender ourselves in trusting obedience to Him, by believing "that which" He says to us. Therefore, because this union of sign and reality . . . is already present in the divine act of revelation, we call this union not a mere instrumental union but a sacramental union.[120]

Smith concludes that Brunner's revelation is primarily the personal presence and revealing act of God in Christ manifested through the Holy Spirit in personal-present encounter. He also concludes that the logic of Brunner's explanation demands that revelation is secondarily a communication of truths about God. It is principally a terminological matter that Brunner insists on calling the first element alone 'revelation.' It is most likely a reaction to the exaggeration of Protestant orthodoxy. It is clear in Brunner that the two are 'necessarily connected elements' of the one single process. Smith concludes that if we do not like Brunner's terminology at least his hierarchization of the faith elements commands support. He cites Karl Rahner. "Revelation is, in its primary form, not the communication of a determined number of propositions. . .," Rahner writes, "but an historical dialogue between God and man, in which something occurs, and the communication refers to and is related to the occurence, to the Act of God."[121] The understanding of this issue of 'primary and secondary faith' is most important for understanding the revisional struggle over the 1967 Confession.

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[119] Joseph J. Smith, Emil Brunner's Theology of Revelation (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo University Publications, 1967), p. 130.

[120] Wahrheit . . ., pp. 83-85.

The 'Doctrine Question': the Possibility of Development

The second reflection concerns the 'doctrine problem' from the aspect of the 'permanency' and 'infallibility' of

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[121] Smith, op. cit., p. 151 citing K. Rahner, "The Development of Dogma," Theological Investigations, trans. Cornelius Ernst, (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961), I, p. 48.

'truth.' This question is also relevant to the 1967 Confession. Every 'confessional statement' is a further attempt to interpret the primary witness of the Scriptures. Whether about the Bible or about its Confessional-interpretations we must answer the question: is there anything of 'permanent-truth-value'--even if in some ways 'reformable'--in these doctrinal developments? Implicitly the question asks: can there be any true-continuous-doctrinal-development? The question entails one's entire theology-of-theology and its role as a part of the revelational process (the epistemological part). At present we can only set up the neo-orthodox principles of solution. The ecumenical possibilities will be discussed in the final chapter.

Barth rejected any infallibility for the confessional-doctrine in itself or of itself. Infallibility belongs sovereignly to God and is mediated to the believer only in the faith-event. Because of man's sinfulness or untimely presumption of the Spirit at every other moment doctrine must be fallible. (We introduced the term 'potentially infallible.') Brunner's thoughts give us the final setting. According to Smith Brunner compares doctrine 'to a telescope through which we see Christ himself.' The goal of faith is to encounter Him, not doctrine. Doctrine is not the object of faith, but only its expression and confession. In this sense Brunner said that the Evangelical Church spoke of confession rather than dogma and a 'law of faith.' Yet the confession is also a norm of doctrine and we can't have Christ without 'correct' doctrine by which is meant a doctrine which 'points in the right direction'--to Christ. It does not mean perfect correspondence between concept and object. Hence the authority of a confession is not absolute but relative. As the product of men the Confession is 'fundamentally fallible and probably in need of improvement.' For the individual this relative authority of the Confession demands that he measure his immature faith with the 'mature faith of the entire Church.' This latter faith may always find better expression. Brunner himself concludes:

> Even the Church as a whole is not infallible . . . Even its understanding of the Word is never definitive, finished once and for all. . . . Therefore, the confession of the Church is no infallible dogma but a provisional attempt to express the doctrinal content of the Word of God in definite formulas. Every 'dogma' stands under the reservation of better knowledge and instruction from Holy Scripture.[122]

This is an unending never completed process, but in itself this does not say it is a totally fallible process. Our own conclusion is that many of the Brunnerian phrases need spelling-out. Such are: 'fundamentally fallible and probably in need of improvement,' the always possible 'finding better expression,' and the 'never definitive, finished, once and for all.' Are these completely incompatible with a continuously-growing-truth, a true development of doctrine? Doesn't true development demand a certain irreformability of doctrine (lasting truth) and a certain mediated infallibility in the believer? Here stands the practical ecumenical question loud and clear.

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[122] *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12 referring to *Dogmatik*, I, pp. 62-63; and citing *Offenbarung* . . ., p. 153, 157 and *Dogmatik*, I, 67.

A Closing Note: Living-Revelation

By way of preparation for the 1967 Confession we close on a positive note concerning the 'living-revelation' of the Church, the revelation which is found in her daily life and which we may call 'the reconciling power of the ordinary.' Its scope extends far beyond any caché of propositional truths while always connecting itself with the original gospel record and its traditioned interpretation. It is one of Brunner's richest ideas on revelation. He says it better than we:

> In conclusion, it must be remembered that the Church, in the sense of *ekklesia*, is a special form of the revelation not only through its word but *also through its life*, which is spontaneous expression of His powerful presence. This need not take place, as it did in the early *ekklesia*, through miracles and deeds of power. The revelation of God in the *ekklesia* "occurs everywhere the living Christ through His Spirit fills and moves men in such a way that their existence and their actions become a sign for others." A simple act of everyday life, a modest service of love, a humble sacrifice can take on the character of a revelation of God's holiness and love.

> True, alone they are incomplete. They need the word to become genuine revelation. But where these signs are lacking, there the word of the *ekklesia* lacks the divine reality and power which makes it the revelation of God. "The power-filled word alone is revelatory, but as filled with power, it . . . brings forth deeds." "The God who revealed Himself in deeds has not ceased to reveal Himself in deeds." "Jesus Christ is not only active in the word that proclaims Him, but He also bears witness to Himself in the love and brotherhood imparted by Him, as the hidden source of which He only gradually becomes known." But it is only in the *unity of* witness by . . . word and witness by . . . life that the *ekklesia* can perfectly fulfill its function of historically mediating God's revelation in Christ to men. Genuine tradition, . . . that binds the . . . historical revelation in Christ with the present, is the preaching existence of the brotherhood . . . which mirrors . . . the Apostles, and the life of the original *ekklesia* as recorded in the biblical canon.[123]

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[123] *Ibid*., pp. 112-13.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE 1967 CONFESSION AND ITS NEW DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

General Background

The theologies of Barth and Brunner form a sharp contrast with the Westminster Confession's theology of revelation or its lack thereof. The struggle in American Presbyterianism with biblical orthodoxism was in large measure due to Westminster's underdevelopment of Calvin's embryonic epistemology of faith. The needed development had many clear pointers. Westminster's first chapter (Of the Holy Scripture) needed a sharp re-casting, or better, a deeper theological underpinning. It could be done by developing the implicit 'fundamental theology' of the early Reformers. Before it was to come about however 'orthodoxy' had to run its course. Starting with Calvin's own ambivalence the tendency toward 'biblicism' developed progressively--especially in terms of anti-Roman and anti-Lutheran polemics. In American Presbyterianism even the New School held onto the scholastic-calvinist conception of biblical-authority and in our own century the 'tendency' was followed with narrow logic to the fundamentalism of the Machen school.

One of Dr. Machen's disciples, Edwin Rian, typifies the arguments of the 'fundamentalist position.' "The question of the final authority of the Bible is at the very heart of Protestantism" Rian argues. "When men no longer believe in this dogma, it is only logical that they should place the seat of authority in religion, in some word or experience of man . . ."[1] Explaining his thesis, Rian presents the 'orthodox paradox.' Claiming that Machen's Orthodox Presbyterian Church was the only true Presbyterian Church, he argued that it was a church devoted to the Bible as opposed to Church Councils and General Assemblies. Here the paradox enters. Machen's group left the northern Presbyterian Church because the Church Deliverances once favorable to their own 'fundamentalistic interpretations' had been declared un-constitutional. Thus the orthodox claim--that "here is one Church which . . . trusts emphatically in the Bible as God's revelation to man and as containing God's plan of salvation for man"[2]--is denied in actuality. It illustrates the disaster that comes when one tries to idolize one of the reciprocal-elements involved in the theological-norm. Inevitably the other criteria make their absence felt.

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[1] Edwin H. Rian, The Presbyterian Conflict, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1940, p. 208.

[2] Ibid., pp. 206, 246.

The Polemical Context of the 1967 Confession: Dowey versus The Chicago Committee

Biblical fundamentalism did not totally disappear from Presbyterianism with the 1936 schism. Some embers were still glowing even as late as 1965 as witnessed by the opponents to the proposed Confession. One of the opponents, John Gerstner, complains "that the whole mentality of the new Confession is different from that of the old one. Its intention is probably not revision but rejection."[3] He proceeds then to argue that if the Bible is not inspired we have no norm. While willing to concede that 'Christ is the one sufficient revelation,' he asks why it is not equally granted that the one sufficient revelation of Jesus Christ is the Bible. And so the argument over the 1967 Confession began. Dr. Gerstner's question had already been put by himself and the so-called 'Chicago Committee'[4] to Dr. Dowey by way of a joint interview in the

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[3] John H. Gerstner, "A Church Historian Warns: Presbyterians are Demoting the Bible," Christianity Today, 10 (1965), pp. 243-45. Dr. Gerstner teaches at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

[4] The Committee was comprised of a group who were opposing the revision as such: Cary N. Weisiger 3rd--the chairman; John Calvin Reid--vice-chairman; and members, Gerstner, Leitch (who had resigned from Dowey's Committee of Fifteen) Smith, Tate, Halverson, Milligan, Schreiner, Pritchard, and Kirk. John Calvin Reid was also a member of the P.U.B.C. (Presbyterians United for Biblical Confession). "The group's intention was," according to Presbyterian Life, Feb. 1, 1967, p. 23, "that the proposed Confession in its original form did not strongly enough emphasize the authority of the Bible. Following the submission of a revised text . . . the members of P.U.B.C. generally expressed themselves in support of the document." (Cf. J. C. Reid, Presb. Life, Oct. 1, 1966.)

Presbyterian Life. The argumentation on both sides gives us the proximate-background for understanding the struggle for the 1967 Confession.

Gerstner, the spokesman for the Chicago Committee, was questioned first:

> (Q.) Is it a serious matter to deny the inspiration of the Bible, as long as we still believe in Christ as the Supreme authority?
> (R.) Yes, for how can we know and be sure Christ is the Word of God . . . except by the Bible? How can we accept Christ as our authority and at the same time reject his estimate of the Holy Scriptures?[5]

Dowey responded to the Chicago Committee's query and spelled-out his own interpretation of the New Confession's intention:

> (Q.) What is the "intended revision" of Westminster on the subject of the Bible?
> (R.) It is certainly not a denial of inspiration.
>
> (Q.) Then what . . . ?
> (R.) It is a shift away from the peculiar emphasis of Westminster that rested everything on how the Bible was written ("inspiration") to an emphasis on what God reveals through the Bible ("revelation").
>
> (Q.) Is Westminster one-sided at this point?
> (R.) Yes. The contest against Rome in an authoritarian age drove Westminster away from the personal evangelical center of revelation found in most Reformation Confessions. The formal doctrine of "inspiration" with no mention of Christ (ch. 1) usurped the place of the great Reformation theme of faith centered in Christ, which appears greatly reduced and weakened (ch. 14). Westminster calls the Bible the Word of God twenty-odd times, but it does not call Jesus Christ the Word even once.

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[5] Presbyterian Life, Nov. 15, 1965, p. 14.

> (Q.) What is the intention of the proposed Confession?
> (R.) To return to the center, Christ the Word, "the Word contained in these books" as the old Genevan Confession puts it.
>
> (Q.) What about the Bible's own testimony to "inspiration"?
> (R.) This belongs to theology, but not to a brief confession. If "inspiration" is not explained, it is only a word. When it is explained, one must decide among various theories. This is important, but the *what* that we all preach, regardless of these theories remains uppermost.
>
> (Q.) Are we merely going back? Is there no advance?
> (R.) . . . We may now cease perimeter battles about Biblical *minutiae* that have often been fought against modern science and against critical history on badly chosen fronts.
> . . . It was his [God's] Providence that hid from the church the alleged "inerrant originals," so that those who speak of them have first to invent them. There is no doubt, however, about who is the Living Word to whom the Scripture bears "witness" (Jn. 5:39).[6]

On the important topic of "witness" both sides had something to say. The Chicago Committee (Gerstner) commented as follows:

> (Q.) Does the proposed Confession teach that the Bible is the "normative" witness to revelation?
> (R.) Yes, it does.
>
> (Q.) Is this approximately the same as . . . our ordination subscription has required, that the Bible is "the infallible rule of faith and practise?"
> (R.) No . . . the word taken in its technical theological meaning is higher than the proposed Confession of 1967 teaches, and taken in its popular sense [=average or "normal"], it is lower.

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

> (Q.) Then what does the Confession mean by normative?
> (R.) It seems to mean that since the Bible is only a human record of the original revelation, we should compare later revelation with it. . . . Later so-called revelations may be higher as well as lower than the Bible . . . It is called "the norm or authority over all other witnesses." But the Bible, according to the proposed Confession is not recognized as the inspired Word of God, so how can it have this authority?[7]

To this "normative" problem (which 'underneath' is really the search for the left-out word 'inspiration') Dowey had a short reply:

> (Q.) Do you, then, take the Bible to be so distinct from the living Word that "later so-called revelations" may be higher as well as lower than the Bible?
> (R.) By no means. The Bible is the sole source and norm of revelation. A norm is "an authoritative rule" (Webster).
>
> (Q.) What about normative?
> (R.) Last May [1965] at the General Assembly it became clear that colloquial use of the word norm . . . (as) "average" has underminded the technical theological use of the term. This was announced at that time when it was too late to amend the Report. We hope the new [amending] Committee of Fifteen will find a better word to say the same thing.[8]

Summary: The Authority Problem and the 1967 Confession

The problem of scriptural authority was to be, then, the next stage of development for American Presbyterianism. The struggle would be its most significant. "The conflict," wrote Nichols (referring to the 1900 revision but applying equally to the 1967 revision), "was . . . a struggle in theological method. American Presbyterian theology had hitherto been dominated by confessional systematics. But now this kind of theology was challenged by the new disciplines of Biblical and historical theology."[9] Dr. Peter Brunner (nephew of Emil) furthers this statement by attributing much of the confusion of Confessional symbolics to the confusion about Scriptural authority and so to the confusion about their interrelationship. "Before another denomination writes and adopts still another 'confessional' statement updating or replacing the older traditional ones," writes Brunner, "perhaps it would be best for member congregations to see whether confessional change is really only symptomatic of deeper problems involving the heart of the Gospel and the authority of Scripture."[10]

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[7] Ibid., p. 14 (brackets and italics are ours).

[8] Ibid., p. 15.

Besides the problematic-aspect there was also the developmental-aspect of revelation. There was Christ the Word and the apostolic preaching "witness" as well as the written word or written-witness. There was also contemporary man's dynamic faith--including preaching, teaching, theologizing, confessing and confession-making. All were and are under the guide of the Spirit in an ongoing revelational-traditioning process. Our question now is: what progress did American Presbyterian theology make in articulating a reasonable and credible explanation of the inter-relationships of these various facets of the revelation-faith-process? All the foregoing chapters on American Presbyterian history now converge in the Confession of 1967.

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[9] Nichols, Hist., p. 189.

[10] P. Brunner, "Confessional Problems," Christianity Today (Aug. 27, 1965), p. 31 (1179).

THE 1967 CONFESSION ON SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY: PROPOSAL, DEBATE, AND EMENDATION

An "Introductory Commentary"

The 1967 Confession should be read over the shoulder of the Westminster Confession while looking in the direction of neo-orthodoxy. The Committee of Fifteen were explicit in admitting their contravention of their initial intent _not_ to revise Westminster. In their introductory essay they wrote:

> This section is an intended revision of the Westminster doctrine, which rested primarily on a view of inspiration and equated the Biblical canon directly with the Word of God. By contrast, the preeminent and primary meaning of the word of God in the Confession of 1967 is the Word of God incarnate. The function of the Bible is to be the instrument of the revelation of the Word in the living church. It is not a witness among others but the witness without parallel, the norm of all other witness. At the same time (due to the acknowledged humanity in the scriptural process) questions of antiquated cosmology, diverse cultural influences, and the like, may be dealt with by careful scholarship uninhibited by the doctrine of inerrancy which placed the older Reformed theology

> at odds with advances in historical and scientific studies.[11]

One can see in advance the 'immediate issue'--the traditional orthodox theology of inspiration and Scriptural authority versus the broadening of the whole conception of revelation and fundamental theology. A comparison of the original proposal with the final approved version will bring out the _pros_ and _cons_ of the struggle.

The Initial Proposal

In May 1965 the Committee of Fifteen completed the first constitutional step toward the adoption of a New Confession--_proposing_ their Brief Confessional Statement to the 177th General Assembly. The next step would be taken up by another Special Committee for Emendations--who would report to the 178th General Assembly in 1966. During the year following this Assembly the individual Presbyteries would vote (two-thirds of them being necessary to change the Constitution) and the 179th General Assembly (1967) would be the Assembly of ratification and adoption (hence the name 'The Confession of 1967'). We begin our analysis with the 1965 Confessional

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[11] _Report_ . . . , p. 29. It is pointed out by Gerstner in _art. cit_. (_supra_ n. 3), p. 243, that "this [revision] is flatly contrary to the promise . . . "The proposal for amending the Confession does _not_ entail revision or deletion (except for the deletion of the Westminster Larger Catechism) . . .' (p. 1)."

Proposal, limiting discussion for now to the section on the Bible--the section involving the admitted revision of Westminster. The major controversy occurred over the first paragraph:

> B. The Bible
>
> The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears witness in many ways. The Church has received the Old and New Testaments as the normative witness to this revelation and has recognized them as Holy Scriptures.
>
> The New Testament is the recorded testimony of apostles to the coming of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the church. The Old Testament is received in the church as Holy Scripture which bears witness to God's faithfulness to Israel and points the way for fulfillment of his purpose in the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New.
>
> God's Word is spoken to his church today where the Scriptures are faithfully preached and attentively read in dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with readiness to receive their truth and direction.
>
> The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ. The words of the Scriptures are the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought-forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current, and the understanding of them requires literary and historical scholarship. The variety of such views found in the Bible shows that God has communicated with men in diverse cultural conditions. This gives the church confidence that he will continue to speak to men in a changing world and in every form of human culture.[12]

Calvin DeVries outlined the 'intention' of the planning Committee. The section on the Bible underscores, he says,[13] the basic issue of revelation with the Bible being 'normative witness' as opposed to being identified with revelation itself. The Bible is under Christ, and the words of the Bible are not in themselves the revelation. "Scripture . . . can be understood as both human and divine" he writes. "We ought not to be distressed at the human qualities of Scripture if we are really persuaded . . . of the unique revelation communicated to us in and only through Scripture."[14] The emphasis was really simple and inspiring, and one might wonder at anyone not agreeing. Change, however even one of emphasis or of re-discovery, takes time and discussion. As already shown in the Dowey-Gerstner ("Chicago Committee") dialogue, the debate centered around the fear that the Scriptures would lose their authority as rule of faith. Dowey had assured the opposition that this was not the planning committee's intention.

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[12] Ibid., p. 35.

[13] Calvin DeVries, An Address to the Presbytery of Chicago, Oct. 23, 1965 (printed in McCormick Quarterly 19/2 (Jan. 1966), p. 171).

The Debate Begins: The Pro-Confession Side

From the start it was obvious that 'consensus' would require emendation, hence compromise and debate. For quick perspective we start at the end of the debate. Here we meet the sharp complaint of Dr. Hendry against the emendations that were adopted. "In the section on the Bible," he says, "the waters have been muddied . . ."[15] Hendry's *apologia* for the original proposal was in agreement with that of DeVries. While the Bible was the "most necessary . . . [and] only means of access to it [revelation],"[16] the Bible was not to be identified with it. Westminster, Hendry argued, had convinced many that the authority of the Bible as the rule of faith had to be first established before it could exercise its function as means of grace. The unamended proposal on the other hand had intended to focus on the Bible as means rather than as rule of faith. "It was in keeping with the central theme . . . the reconciling act of God in Christ, that the emphasis was laid on the function of the Bible . . ." he argued. "Much of the past controversy about authority of the Bible has centered on formal definitions which have had little bearing on the actual role of the Bible in the life of the faith."[17] The emendation-compromise, Hendry felt, had obscurred the original purpose and left a mish-mash of 1647 and 1967.

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[14] *Ibid*., p. 179.

[15] G. S. Hendry, "The Bible in the Confession of 1967," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 60/1 (Oct. 1966), 21.

Dowey, the Committee chairman, had also rejected Westminster's over-emphasis of the 'formal principle.' Contemporary Reformation studies, he showed, had brought about a new climate on the matter of biblical authority. "Chiefly . . . the Bible," he claimed, "is seen as an instrument of revelation under the guidance of the Spirit in the living Church."[18] In the new Confession (even the amended version) Dowey saw the proper hierarchization of the elements involved in the revelation process. Their order of appearance represents their order of primacy: (1) Word, (2) witness, and (3) word. "First, Christ is the Word in the pre-eminent sense," Dowey wrote, "Secondly, the Spirit bears . . . witness to him, creating faith, repentance, obedience, and initiating the new life . . . Thirdly, we have the instrument of the Spirit's witness, the word which is either written or spoken."[19] In replacing the orthodox tendency with the re-discovered reciprocity of the early Reformation Dowey recognized that the authority problem was now made more complex. "Just how the Scripture functions as a norm for the believer and the Church in our day," he said, "will undoubtedly be one of the most difficult problems with which we shall be occupied."[20] The authority problem was now clearly cut loose from bibliolatry, but exactly how the new reciprocity was to be spelled-out was left to theological discussion.

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[16] Hendry, The Westminster Confession Today, p. 26.

[17] Hendry, loc. cit. (n. 15).

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[18] E. A. Dowey, Jr., "The Problem of Revelation in Several Protestant Confessional Documents," A Seminar Paper Delivered to the Princeton Theological Seminary Faculty, n.p. n.d., p. 17.

[19] Edward A. Dowey, A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and An Introduction to "The Book of Confessions" (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 100.

[20] Dowey, art. cit. (n. 18), p. 2.

The Opposition: Amendment of the Original Proposal

Represented by such argumentation as that of the Chicago Committee, the opposition insisted on the authoritative position of the Bible. As a result they secured the following amendments. We single-out the crucial first paragraph (9.27). (To facilitate comparison we *underline* the *additions to* and bracket the *omissions from* the initial proposal.)

> The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears *unique and authoritative* witness [in many ways.] *through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel*. The church has received the *books of the* Old and New Testaments [as the normative witness to this revelation and has recognized them as Holy Scriptures.] as prophetic *and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.*[21]

A cursory reading of the bracketed omissions indicates the climate of the amendments. They "tone down" the new theology of revelation wherein Scripture is the unique "means" among others. The additions "tone-up" the authority of Scripture. The key issue however stands clearly un-amended: the new Confession corrects Westminster's omission of Christ the Word as the revelation and Scripture as his witness.

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[21] *The Proposed Book of Confessions*, p. 181; *B.C.*, 9.27.

Hendry criticizes the emendations, nevertheless, saying that the key sentence which emphasized the Bible in its functional role as 'witness' (sic: "The Church has received the Old and New Testaments as the normative witness to this revelation . . .") was struck-out. The new emphasis he claimed fell upon 'the unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written.' For Hendry the changes "reflect the logic of the Westminster Confession and thus confuse the picture."[22] One of his personal struggles was against the opposition's clinging to 'inspiration.' "Two notes are introduced . . ." he comments, "(1) an authority is located in the words of Scripture, and (2) this authority is associated in a unique way with the Holy Spirit . . ."[23] The phrase 'given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,' Hendry sees as an echo of Westminster's 'given by inspiration' which he seems to equate with verbal inspiration and strongly disclaims. "The Holy Spirit did not originate the Scriptures " he argues. "They owe their origin to the commission which the apostles received from the Lord . . . to be witnesses to him . . . and the promise of the Spirit was attached to this commission as confirmative witnesses . . ."[24] Hendry's final complaint was that the emendations shifted the emphasis from the oral (preaching) to the written (Bible)--hence again back to Westminster. The apostles he argues were commissioned to preach, not to write books. Even the later writing down of the oral testimony was to 'provide a base' for continued preaching. "For the word is a word to be preached," Hendry asserts, "and its written form is secondary and instrumental to that end. But the Confession of 1967, as now amended, has reinstated the primacy of the written word, which is characteristic of the Westminster Confession . . ."[25]

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[22] Hendry, *art. cit.*, p. 22.

[23] *Ibid.*, italics ours.

[24] *Ibid.* Further on in his article (p. 23), while commenting on the sentence--'The Holy Spirit hears unique and

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authoritative witness--through the Holy Scriptures . . . as the word of God written,' Hendry explains that: "This sentence seems to suggest that the Scriptures owe their unique status . . . in the church to an unique relation to the Holy Spirit. But this is to ignore the fact that the unique place of the Scriptures . . . is rooted in the fact that they record the testimony of men who stood in an unique relationship to Christ . . . 'eyewitnesses' (Lk. 1:12) . . .

To this the Holy Spirit was indeed added (Acts 1:5.8)--but not in a privileged or exclusive sense . . . The gift of the Spirit is for all (Acts 2:38), for the preacher . . . called to speak God's word to his church today no less than for the apostle who received his call direct from the risen Lord." Thus Hendry denies inspiration as a unique, privileged, and preservative charism for the authors of Scripture. But he is definitely not opposed to the influence of the Spirit. One could ask Hendry's question another way. Is the need for the Spirit in our own faith (whether in listening to or in preaching the Gospel) so uniquely different from that need in the early church?

[25] *Ibid*., pp. 23-24.

Dowey is not as pessimistic about the addition of the phrase 'as the word of God written.' He recognizes this phrase as saying awkwardly what the whole last sentence says 'with fine precision and clarity.' He does not see it as a return to Westminster. "Here, Scripture derives the name from its role as witness to Christ;" he writes, "there it 'is' the word written by virtue of its author, God. To avoid misunderstanding, the phrase was originally not included . . . Probably it is wise to have included it after all, although some will . . . misunderstand and use the phrase in the older sense."[26] Bibliolatry was dead. The Bible is not identical with the revelation of God. Yet it is the only means of access to it and for this reason even Hendry allowed it to be called 'the word of God written.'

Effect of the New Bibliology on Subscription

Perhaps the most practical application of the new bibliology can be taken from the concomitant polity proposals--especially those pertaining to the subscription formula. "Adoption of the . . . [Confessional] proposals," the Planning Committee tells us, " . . . would require emendations of the Form of Government to bring its language and content into agreement with the entire plan."[27] Thus concerning our long-historied subscription formula--'Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the "system of Doctrine" taught in the Holy Scripture?', the proposal committee could now at last say that the phrase 'system of doctrine' and its companion phrase 'essential and necessary articles' was inappropriate. A new formula was offered which allowed for the broadened confessional base and which above all recognized the new theology of revelation. It clearly showed a hierarchy of authority: "Will you perform the duties of a minister of the gospel in obedience to Christ, under the authority of the Scriptures and *under the continuing instruction and the guidance of* the confessions of this Church?"[28] The announcement in the Preface that the 1967 Confession is *not* a "system of doctrine" rejects, according to Dowey, the position that either Bible or Confession is a self-contained logical whole. "Further, it may be that theology should hold back where the Bible itself holds back," he counsels, "and not fill up all incomplete topics with systematic conclusions. The depth of the mystery of revelation and the limited capabilities of the mind of man will always leave a system incomplete."[29] Dowey adds that the time may come for a greater systematic effort but that now is not the moment.

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[26] Dowey, op. cit. (n. 19), p. 103. See also Hendry, Westminster Confession Today, p. 26.

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[27] *Report* . . .,p40.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 41 (italics are ours and represent the emendation made on the initial proposal).

[29] Dowey, *op. cit*., pp. 37-38.

The 'second question' of the *old* subscription formula was also changed in order that it might reflect the new doctrinal emphasis. Having originated with the 1788 Constitution it asked: 'Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practise?' We have already seen the evolution of this over-definition of biblical-authority. "[The] infallible rule," comments the drafting Committee, "was taken by many to imply not merely matters of 'faith and life,' but the detailed inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible."[30] The remarkable advances in the theology of revelation forced, however, a re-formulation of the subscription formula. The formula now asked: "Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the [normative] *unique and authoritative* witness to Jesus Christ in the Church catholic, and by his *Holy* Spirit God's word to you?"[31] Thus the primacy is taken from the Bible-*as-object of faith* and placed on its *witnessing-function* to the Word of God (Christ) Who is *the* source and norm of life. That which was left somewhat in doubt in the 1902 Brief Statement of Faith was now made clear: the Word of God, and not the word of God, is the ultimate source and norm of faith and life. The two are brought together by the power of the Spirit in the mind and heart of the believer. Dowey offers wise counsel on this point:

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[30] *Report* . . ., *loc. cit*. Dowey (*op. cit*., p. 239) says: "The words 'verbal' and 'plenary' were commonly used as adjectives with inspiration, and 'inerrancy' was paired with infallibility."

[31] *Ibid*. (italics represent *additions to*; brackets the omission from the initial proposal).

> It is hardly possible to remind the reader too often that the entire section on "The Bible" falls under the general heading, "The Communion of the Holy Spirit." Whether we use Calvin's favorite word illumination, or guidance and direction that are more common in this Confession, or various prayers from the New Testament, the intent is the same. Word and Spirit belong together and the hearing of the word is a gift of the Spirit, regardless of the amount of intelligence or learning that are brought to the hearing and reading.[32]

C-67 and the Authority Problem: A Conclusion

In conclusion we disagree with Hendry's reaction against the emendations as merely "conciliating those for whom the authority of the bible is still bound up with the traditional view of the inspiration of the written word . . ."[33] If the amended statement took back some of the sharpness of the original emphasis, it did not take back the primacy given to Christ. The corresponding changes in the Form of Government maintained the full impact of the initially intended revision and gave to the ordination-subscription the christocentric rather than biblio-centric orientation long recommended and struggled for by men like Briggs, the Smiths, and Schaff. The opening statement of the Ordination Ceremony sums up this Presbyterian doctrinal-growth. It actually gives a brief-brief contemporary confession by the whole church on the occasion of our Lord's calling one member to special service. Such an act of faith is the church's response to 'a unique revelational occasion.' The ceremonial reads:

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[32] Dowey, op. cit., p. 111.

[33] Hendry, art. cit. (n. 15), p. 24.

> In this ordination the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as an act of the holy catholic Church and worshipping the one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, affirms its belief in the gospel of the sovereign grace and love of God. Through Jesus Christ, his only son our Lord, incarnate, crucified, and risen, God freely offers to all men forgiveness of sins, renewal by the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. He calls them to labor and to witness and to pray in the fellowship of faith for the coming of his Kingdom throughout the world. _In response to his call the Church now confesses_ that _Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures_ of the Old and New Testaments _witness to him_, _is the source and norm of faith and life_.[34]

The Broader Implications of the New Theology of Revelation

The Preface to the new Confessional Statement reads: "God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of the gospel in any age."[35] The key phrase for us is:

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[34] _Report_ . . ., p. 43 (italics ours).

[35] _Ibid._, p. 31; _B.C._, 9.06.

"The heart of the gospel." It brings us back to the primal insight of Luther, re-developed by Barth and Brunner. The preaching, believing, and confessing of the gospel-core must take priority over its more abstruse points. We must hierarchize and focus the elements of our Christian faith. This requires constant "confessing." The 1967 Confession is one effort of one church to do this. There is a threefold-hierarchy in the gospel-core recognized by the Confession's structure: (1) God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ;[36] (2) Christ's continued presence in his church by the power of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling his mission of calling all men to reconciliation;[37] and (3) Scriptures' various expressions-of-witness to these first two, revealing to faith the sure achievement of God's work even if the understanding of it lies beyond comprehension.[38] This triple hierarchy comprises the three phases of reconciliation: God in Christ, Christ in Church, and Church sent into the world with Word and Spirit. The three are distinguishable, but inseparable. They comprise the three elements of the revelation-process when we view this process in its broadest comprehension. In this sense Christian revelation is reconciling and Christian reconciliation is revealing (God's revealing Himself in Christ through the Spirit's reconciling community).[39]

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[36] See Book of Confessions, nn. 9.06, 9.08.

[37] See B.C., 9.08-9.11.

[38] See B.C., 9.09.

Thus concerning biblical authority the new emphasis is not to get lost in the minutiae of scriptural authority, but rather to emphasize the 'Gospel of Christ' in its core proclamation. Of itself this proclamation is simply a witness to the truth-event of Christian reconciliation. Its ultimate guarantee resides in the Word of God to whom it witnesses. And for this witnessing function it needs an 'authoritative' recording of the primary apostolic-witness and an 'authoritative' traditioning-process to interpret, translate, and transmit this Gospel message. One must not however limit the ways of 'witnessing to the Gospel' to the formal didactic use of the word-written. The other witnesses--preaching, worshiping, and living--are also integral parts of the revelational-process. Dowey maintains a careful balance on this point, and his balance seems to be reflected in the Confession of 1967. In his Commentary he writes:

> The witness that the Spirit bears to Christ through the Scriptures is called unique and authoritative. The Confession carefully avoids saying either that Scripture "is" God's word or that Scripture "is" unique and authoritative as such or in its own right. It is in the function of living witness to Christ the Word that it has its unique place. . . .

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[39] See B.C., 9.41 (the section on Revelation and Religion). Dowey comments (A Commentary . . ., p. 40): "It [reconciliation] is one of the rare terms in the Bible that can epitomize the whole gospel in one word."

> . . . The word of God spoken in a living voice is generally superior to and more common than the written form as a way of communicating the gospel, not only for those who cannot read, but for those who profit especially by explanation, illustration, and application in sermons and various forms of personal and common witness. Nonetheless, the prophetic and apostolic testimony remains the prime source, criterion, and corrective of what is said in current idiom and with attention to contemporary hearers.[40]

We will now study the 1967 Confession as it carries out its own 'witness' to the revelation-message.

FURTHER STUDY OF THE CONFESSION OF 1967

The Structure of the Confession and Its Influence on the Authority Problem

"What . . . out of the Christian past needs most to be reformulated for the sake of the church's confession in our day?"[41]--was the Drafting Committee's challenge. Their response was: "The church preaches, teaches and celebrates above all else God's gift of salvation to men."[42] One passage from II Corinthians seemed to speak with special contemporaneity, which Dowey calls 'one of the most important passages in all Scripture' and which Calvin called 'the best passage of all' on justification by faith.

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[40] Dowey, A Commentary. . . ., pp. 100-01.

[41] Report . . ., p. 27.

[42] Ibid.

> "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors of Christ, God making his appeal through us."[43]

This passage became the pattern for the 1967 Confession's structure: I) the reconciliation of the world by God to himself in Christ, and II) the resulting mission of the Church. The committee further explained this structure in their introductory essay:

> The two main parts of the Confession, "God's Work of Reconciliation" and "The Ministry of Reconciliation," are obviously two aspects of one theme. The structure of the first part is Trinitarian, following the sequence of Son, Father, Spirit as in the apostolic benediction of II Cor. 13:14. The structure of the second part, first mission and then equipment for mission, places the church with unusual emphasis in the context of its aim and goal, thus in a posture of action . . . in the service of reconciliation. The final section points in hope to the triumph of God's purpose.[44]

Dowey would personally have preferred the 'covenant theme,' but points out[45] that one can without great effort see the

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[43] II Cor. 5:18-20, RSV. Dowey comments (A Commentary . . ., p. 41): "It should be read and studied in context, beginning with ch. 5:14 and continuing through ch. 6:10." Dowey cites also Rom. 5:10-11, Colossians 1:15-24, and Ephesians 2:11-22.

[44] Report . . . , p. 29.

[45] See Dowey, A Commentary . . . , p. 41.

'covenant' in the Confession's present structure: (1) the grace of God calling his people to serve him (Part I), (2) the service to which they are called (Part II), and (3) the promises which give them their hope (Part III). "Another theme carried throughout," Dowey notes, "is the exposition of the incarnation. The life of Jesus is the place where God's reconciliation takes place (8,9) and the clue to the Creator's love (15). It also gives direction to contemporary lives (19,24) and the pattern for the mission of the church (32)."[46]

Our primary concern as we analyze the different sections will be to relate them to the theology of revelation with its reciprocal relationship to the theology of authority. With freedom from an overly narrow ecclesiastical-biblical authority we have seen the evolution of a revelation-theology whose emphasis fell on 'a _living_ tradition in a _living_ church'--where life demanded growth and development. This new emphasis reciprocally deepened the theology of authority (epistemology of faith) by bringing out its own breadth and complexity. The 1967 Confession reflects this reciprocal growth in two ways: (1) in its doctrinal development (explicit and implicit); and (2) in the doctrinal implications of its development in polity.

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[46] _Ibid_.

Doctrinal Development in the 1967 Confession

1. The Church

Calling to mind our chapters on authority with special mention of the roles of the Church and Reason in the development ('reform') of doctrine, we find the same theological trends in the Confession of 1967. "Jesus Christ . . . is present in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue and complete his mission"[47]--the Confession proper begins. In the *first section* (God's Reconciling Work) we have *the Church's role* immediately placed at the center: "Those joined to him by faith are set right with God and commissioned to serve as his *reconciling community*. Christ is the head of this community, the church, which began with the apostles and continues through all generations."[48] This community or church is a community of the Holy Spirit (recall Barth and Brunner) who guides it and is with it in special ways:

> God the Holy Spirit fulfills the work of reconciliation in man. The Holy Spirit creates and renews *the church as* the *community* in which men are *reconciled* to God and to one another . . . [W]hen the Gospel is proclaimed and believed, . . . [i]n this experience the Spirit brings God's forgiveness to men, moves them to respond in faith . . . and initiates the new life in Christ.
>
> The new life takes shape in community in which men know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are . . .

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[47] *B.C.*, n. 9.07.

[48] *B.C.*, n. 9.10.

> . . . The teaching of apostles and prophets guides men in living this new life, and the Christian community nurtures and equips them for their ministries.[49]

In a word this 'new life' within the community patterns itself on the life of Jesus.[50]

2. The Church and Scripture

Concerning the crucial issue of the Church and Scripture, the emphasis in the New Confession is on the reciprocal relationship: the Spirit speaks to and guides the Church through the Scriptures, while the Scriptures are interpreted by and in the Church under the illumination of the same Spirit. Thus the Confession states the two principles for interpretation:

> The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God's work of reconciliation in Christ . . .
>
> The Church . . . has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.
>
> God's word is spoken to his church where the Scriptures are faithfully preached and

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[49] B.C., 9.20-9.22, 9.24.

[50] See Dowey, A Commentary . . . , pp. 81-96, 112-14. Dowey sums up (p. 93): "The direction which the new life takes from the life of Jesus is not abstracted or isolated from either its Biblical setting or its present setting in the church. The teaching of apostles and prophets, which is a way of referring to the whole of Scripture, guides men in living this life. The Christian community nurtures and equips them . . . in church, family, and community."

> attentively read in dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit and with readiness to receive their truth and direction.[51]

In the Subscription questions we are told that the Church does her basic doctrinal guidance through her confessional standards as interpretative of Scripture. Dowey explicitly affirms this interpretative-developmental role in his introductory essay:

> . . . confessional standards . . . are meant to be subordinate to the Bible and superior to ministers and people. They were written not in a vacuum, but in interaction between the Bible and the need of the living church at a definite time.
>
> . . . It is not calamity, but quite right and good that a confessional statement is interpretation rather than repetition of Biblical materials. The Bible must always be transposed into a contemporary key . . .
>
> This is not mere "relevance" or "application" of a truth that hovers above history. The message is always spoken in the idiom of a certain time and place. The preaching, teaching, and social responsibility that characterize the Reformed tradition are rightly understood as translations of the Bible into the language and ethics of the living church. Creeds and confessions are guides for the work of translating.[52]

The problem, as we shall now see, is 'how' and 'with what power' the Church interprets God's word.

3. Formal Preaching and Teaching

The confession's reflexive-judgment on the church's formal preaching-teaching role gave new emphasis to the principle of reform and adaptation.

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[51] B.C., 9.29-9.30.

[52] Dowey, A Commentary . . . , p. 28.

> God instructs his church and equips it for mission through preaching and teaching. These, when carried on in fidelity to the Scriptures and dependence upon the Holy Spirit, let his word be heard and bring men to accept and follow Christ. The message is addressed to men in particular situations. Therefore effective preaching, teaching, and personal witness require disciplined study of both the Bible and the contemporary world. All acts of public worship should be conducive to men's hearing of the gospel in a particular time and place and responding with fitting obedience.[53]

With the horizontal dimension of adaptation and reform must also come the vertical. "The whole process of preaching and teaching," Dowey tells us, "is from beginning to end thus dependent. The Spirit is not a method beside other methods . . . The Spirit is in, with, and under all processes of study, preparation, and action."[54] And the aim is clear: that the people hear the word of God and accept and follow Christ. "Preaching and teaching, thus, are instruments," Dowey concludes, " . . . by which a task is completed."[55] This again leads us to the question 'how?' Who will discern the presence of the Spirit? This leads in turn to the 1967 Confession's 'reflexive theology' on confessing.

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[53] B.C., n. 9.49 (italics are ours).

[54] Dowey, A Commentary . . . , p. 144.

[55] Ibid.

4. Theology of Confess-ing

The Confession's theology of confess-ing is found in the Preface. Here it is asserted that confess-ing can be in words and/or deeds. "The church confesses its faith when it bears a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ . . . in words and deeds as the need of the time required."[56] We find the earliest forms within the Scriptures themselves, which confessions were often borrowed from liturgical-action contexts. Specific to the 'doctrinal confession,' it is said:

> Confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. No one type of confession is exclusively valid, no one statement is _irreformable_. Obedience to Jesus Christ alone identifies the one universal church and supplies the continuity of its tradition . . .[57]

"Subordinate confessional statements," comments Dowey, "are go-betweens, intermediate between the Bible and contemporary life and language. Therefore . . . _no one statement is irreformable_. The Confession rejects verbatim the decree of the First Vatican Council (1870) that papal definitions are 'infallible' and 'irreformable.'"[58] Dowey proceeds never-the-less to agree with the Confession that _confessions are subordinate standards_. "Subordinate standards," he says, "are, nonetheless, standards . . . The discipline of the church is equipped to counsel with, admonish, and even hold trial for one ordained who seriously rejects the faith expressed in the confessions."[59] Here we come to our impasse. The goal of certain confessional teaching (preaching) is that the word of God might be heard. 'Faith,' we have also heard, may be expressed in confessions. If faith can be 'expressed' and 'heard' in confessions, must there not be a 'participated infallibility' (recall Barth) present in the believer (teacher) at the moment of hearing (teaching)? And must there not be a 'participated irreformability' in the 'faith-truth' communicated? It would seem that the same 'faithful obedience' that may arise through the witness of Scripture may also arise through the interpretative teaching-preaching-confessing witnesses. "Throughout the Confession of 1967," admits Dowey, "obedience is faithful obedience, or that which results from faith in the gospel. It is the total response in service and love which receives its direction from the deeds and words of Jesus, found in Scripture, and in the total setting of Scripture and the Chrisian community . . ."[60] Dowey would surely include Confessions in the 'total setting of the Scripture.' When one speaks therefore of the power of 'direction to' a response of faith, must it not involve the necessary means to faith, viz., an infallible communication of revelation? Concerning the denial of any irreformability there seems to be a tinge of ambivalence in Dowey's mind. Speaking of the Book of Confessions he says: "The Book of Confessions makes clear the actual nature of creeds and confessions. They have appeared irregularly . . ., and they bear marks both of transience and permanence."[61] Is there any connection between 'permanence' and 'irreformability?'

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[56] _B.C._, 9.02.

[57] _B.C._, 9.03 (italics ours).

[58] Dowey, _A Commentary_ . . . , p. 30.

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., p. 103. Dowey adds (p. 30): "The obedience of faith described here and in other Reformed confessions is a response to grace, not conformity to canonized traditions, unless of course, they serve this obedience."

5. Theology of "Reform" and "Development"

Obedience to Christ calls for 'reform' and 'development' in doctrine and in life. This brings us to the theology of 'reform.' A good place to begin is with the evolution of the meaning itself of 'reform.'

In reaction to the polemical and often mis-guided negative-meaning of reform--viz., 'change of, correction of error in, opposition to and discontinuity with'--there evolved a positive meaning: 'developing and deepening of, at the same time as continued-agreement with.' In this light not every reform concerns error; truth too is reformable. The recognition of this 'principle of development' and 'progressivity in understanding' was to revolutionize Christianity's theology of revelation. This positive sense of 'reform' was recognized by all to be a constantly necessary process. Rome's

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[61] Ibid., p. 32 (italics ours).

'absolutes' were 'unstaticized' without being necessarily 'changed.' The narrow Protestant view, often overidentified with 'change from error' and interpreted as denying any progression in doctrinal truth, was unshackled. Both exaggerations led only to presumption or despair of the continuing power of the Spirit in his community. As an example of the negative conception of 'reform' we cite Dowey's following description:

> Reform presupposes _decline_ and endeavors to _recover from it._ It brings the old new again into a new age. The classic Protestant Reformers understood themselves to be wiping out a thousand years of canonized novelties in order to bring the older, purer gospel to new life . . .
>
> The nub of the Protestant Reformation was the reform of doctrine, an issue that still divides Protestant from Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. This does not mean that Rome stands still or that "Reformed" churches are models of continuing reformation. In _principle_, however, _it is the dividing line between_ the church's claim to _infallibility_ and its _confession of sinfulness_.[62]

Does Dr. Dowey imply by his 'principle'(in the last sentence) that only Rome may understand 'reform' in a positive-developmental sense while the Reform-church must concentrate always and only on purifying the church from decline after decline? An affirmative answer would seem to conflict with his more positive reflections which follow. We start by looking at the overall significance of the _Book_ of Confessions.

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[62] _Ibid_., p. 31 (italics ours).

The theological significance in the adoption of a Book of Confessions is the credence and tribute thereby paid to the Spirit's work in progressive confess-ing or doctrinal development. Each new 'confession' is hopefully a progressive and illumined interpretation of Scripture. In as much as they are Spirit-guided interpretations of the Gospel they are, like Scripture, reflective of Christ and of his gospel-truth. Their reflections are to be judged by the church over-against the 'totality of the Gospel' (the analogy of faith). This positive theology of reform is reflected in the Preface to the Confession proper. In his commentary Dowey notes: "The present tense of the verbs is important. The Book of Confessions . . . is a present aid in understanding the gospel today. . . . These great subordinate standards . . . are a living heritage."[63] Dowey and the Planning Committee explicitly attested to the principle of development while discussing 'variations in the creeds.' "The variations to be found among the various documents . . .," they said, "represent a variety within a general homogeneity. They . . . contribute to the historical process by which now one, now another topic of theology or formulation of doctrine comes to the fore . . ."[64] A certain priority is given by

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Report . . . , p. 23.

Dowey to the contemporary document. "There is an _inherent logic_ in such a collection," he notes, "that gives the contemporary document more force and more immediate applicability than the others. New branches . . . are higher and more prominent . . ."[65] Thus variations, he claims, do not lead to chaos or indifference but rather open our eyes "to the variety and vitality that has gone with the speaking of the word and the incarnation of the Word in human history. The _one word_ will be spoken in many idioms yesterday, and . . . in new idioms today and tomorrow."[66] The church that denies tradition concludes Dowey "deludes and impoverishes itself . . . The confessional documents . . . should give guidance drawn not only from the recent past, but from its whole heritage."[67] Further discussion must develop this positive notion of reform and development. Inevitably it leads to the notions of infallibility and irreformability.

The 1967 Polity Changes and Their Implications

1. General Implication

If we have often noted that doctrinal evolution commands polity evolution, it has also been implied that the opposite is true: polity development can command doctrinal development. This is especially so with regard to the ecclesial aspect of authoritative doctrinal-development. The foreclosure of biblical-ecclesiastical authoritarianism bespoke a maturation and responsibility redounding on all Christians--individuals and churches. The 'community of the Spirit' had come of age.

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[65] Dowey, _A Commentary_ . . . , p. 33.

[66] _Ibid_., p. 34

[67] _Report_ . . . , p. 22.

2. The Subscription Formula and Theological Responsibility

The 1967 broadening of the subscription formula was unique and unprecedented in American Presbyterianism. Fundamentally however it was a rediscovery of an under-developed insight of the Reform concerning the church's role in the revelational process. Simply stated it said: the whole church has an inherent mandate to develop, interpret, and confess her faith ever anew in response to her own time and circumstance. Whereas broader subscriptional freedom might have been harmful for the adolescent American church, it was now seen to be a release from a human limitation which if rendered permanent was opposed to the essential nature of the community of the Spirit. Its nature was promised to entail the opposite course: the responsible fostering of life and growth. This was not to deny the need for stabilization, consolidation, and protection, forces necessary for the growth process itself. But it was to deny any excess to these forces, as had obviously been the case.

The new emphasis on responsible theological freedom (recall Barth) made possible by the subscription formula might also be read between the lines of the confessional statement in its section on the role of _all_ community members in the mission of the word (doctrinal) as well as the mission of action (pastoral). "Each member . . . , " the Confession stated, "_is responsible for the integrity of his witness_ in his own particular situation. . . . In his own competence, [he] helps to guide the church."[68] This new ecclesiological development has not been limited to the Presbyterian or Reformed Churches alone. The principle and obligation for development and reform make up a common Christian profession by virtue of baptism. Ecclesiastical coddling is as deleterious to growth as tyranny.

Dowey makes an important point in his commentary. It refers to the 'tension' between the individual and the communal in the life of the church. The Confession chose the words 'gathered and dispersed' to describe this duality. These words, Dowey explains, "express the twofold state and two-way movement of the church's life . . . that some things are done in concert and others solo . . ."[69] He warns that two errors are to be avoided. Individuality cannot be crushed by a clergy ridden church. On the other hand the "dispersed" should not be thought of as isolated, individual existence where the Christian is cut off from all sustenance. "The two forms of the church's life," he notes, "are equally natural and necessary and neither has priority over the other."[70] These principles implicit to general authority are vital to any theology of doctrinal authority. The difficult problem is to spell them out and to balance individual freedom with communal consensus.

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[68] _B.C._, 9.38 (italics ours).

[69] Dowey, _A Commentary_ . . . , p. 116.

The new ecclesiological emphasis commands, finally, a renewal of trust in the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the various 'institutions, forms, and orders' by which the church organizes and directs its own individual and corporate life. The Holy Spirit continues to transmit the revelation of Christ in the church and through her institutions. The church is a necessary instrument--indispensable for the ordinary economy of salvation. "In recognition of special gifts of the Spirit and for the ordering of its life as a community," the Confession states, "the church calls, trains, and authorizes certain members for leadership and oversight . . . These are instruments of mission, not ends in themselves."[71] Another word for 'instruments of mission' is 'service.'

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[70] Ibid.

[71] B.C., 9.39.

3. The Reform Principle

Within its new 'theology of polity' the Confession of 1967 enunciates the application of the 'reform principle,' declaring the possibility of further development in forms and orders. "Every church order," the Confession states, "must be open to such reformation as may be required to make it a more effective instrument of reconciliation."[72] Rightly understood this is far from a renewal of the anti-Roman or the anti-Episcopal polemics, but a guarantee of 'openness' to search for the needed polity. Whatever the polity will evolve to be it must protect the rightful freedom of all members of the Church to participate in her mission. Among many 'relatives,' this guarantee of freedom appears as one of the 'absolutes.' The principle is included in the body-proper of the new Confession:

> A Presbyterian polity recognizes the responsibility of all members for ministry and maintains the organic relation of all congregations in the church. It seeks to protect the church from exploitation by ecclesiastical or secular power and ambition.[73]

In the context of this 'principle of reform' as 'openness,' the Confession states: "Different orders have served the gospel, and none can claim exclusive validity."[74] But, paradoxically, at this very point of opting for complete openness the Confession could be taken "to betray the idiom and accent of one special tradition."[75] Thus Dowey comments: "This leaves the church of the Confession of 1967 open to new possibilities, and free to change. But it forbids adopting or being taken into some non-reformable order."[76] Here is another expression of the Calvinist paradox: the absolutivity of the semper reformanda. For now, the stress must fall on the positive part of the principle: complete openness to the Spirit who moves when and where he will. The paradox must be worked out according to his light. There are 'signs' that this is already happening in our time.[77] The question remains: can there be any irreformability in the Christian church?

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[72] B.C., 9.40.

[73] Ibid., ll. 263-270 (B.C., p. 183, n. 9.40).

[74] Ibid., ll. 266-267 (B.C., p. 183, n. 9.40).

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[75] Report, p. 29.

[76] Dowey, A Commentary . . . , p. 120 (italics ours).

[77] It is almost unbelieveable (except that in our times we are surprised by virtually nothing) that in 1967 a recently installed Episcopal Bishop preached a sermon (cf. R. McAfee Brown, "A Pan-Christian Papacy?" Commonweal, 86 (July 14, 1967), 446): " . . . urging all Christians to acknowledge the pope as their spiritual father . . . ," upon which Dr. Robert McAfee Brown comments (ibid.): " . . . we non-Roman Catholics can give to the pope a degree of recognition we have been loathe to give him in the past, seeing him as a visible symbol of the united voice and united concern for which we are all praying, giving him as full a measure of allegiance and attention as we can in good conscience give, even across the gaping chasms of our present divisions." On the other hand there is much agitation in the Roman Church for the greater voice of all her members, as the recent event of the Papal encyclical Humanae vitae has brought out as never before.

4. Doctrinal Development

Our last point, on 'doctrinal development,' returns us to the Form of Government's subscription ceremony. Its development of doctrine and its implied theology of development are in some ways more bold than that of the Confession proper. In the 'brief-brief ordination confession' we have already seen[78] that "Jesus Christ, the Word of God . . . is the source and norm of faith and life."[79] The same 'confession' continues by spelling out the church's role in the developmental-revelational process. It is the most comprehensive statement on the topic in the entire confessional-*corpus*. It reads as follows:

> This Church, *under the authority of the Scriptures, and in the tradition of* the one catholic and apostolic Church, is guided especially by . . . [we omit here the list of creeds from the Book of Confessions], and *makes* such *other confessions as* are from time to time *required by the Holy Spirit*.
>
> This Church orders its life according to the Directory of Worship, Form of Government, and Book of Discipline *under the Scriptures interpreted in the Church by the guidance of* the Holy Spirit.[80]

The church is guided in ordering its life by creeds which in turn are interpretations of the Scriptures under the Spirit. Presupposing the 'brief-brief confession' the ordinand is asked:

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[78] See footnote 34.

[79] *Report* . . . , p. 43, quoting from The Form of Government, Chap. XVII, Section 7.

[80] *Ibid*., p. 44, citing from the ordination formulary, *Form of Government*, Chap. XIX, Section 4 (brackets and italics are ours).

> Knowing these things . . .
>
> (3) Will you perform the duties of a minister of the gospel [ruling elder (or deacon)] in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of the Scriptures, and under the continuing instruction and guidance of the confessions of this Church?[81]

The polemical days of an isolated bibliolatry have yielded to the one obedience (in faith) to the personal authority of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures supply the base for doctrinal authority, but always with the community of the Spirit as its 'interpretational-locus' supplying the necessary continuity in instruction and guidance. "These are concentric circles of authority," Dowey concludes,"moving from the middle outward: Christ, Bible, Confession . . . Some things in the Bible are central and others peripheral. The rule for measuring is nearness to the theme of salvation in Christ . . . Here the church's confession carries out a crucial function. A confession can either undermine or overstate Biblical authority."[82]

Summary of Doctrinal Implications from Polity Changes

In the 1967 polity-changes we have an implicit 'theology of polity,' a part of ecclesiology. It outlines especially the church's role in the revelation-faith process, more specifically in the authoritative 'traditioning' of doctrine. It further spells-out the traditioning-role as a mandate to 'interpret the Scriptures,' which means to develop the gospel-faith such that it becomes more understandable, and so more credible, to the faithful. This 'development process' is one of the positive functions of reform. The living-church must do this under a triple authoritative influence: (1) under the Spirit in obedience to Christ the Word (which is to say 'in faith'); (2) under the normative authority of the gospel; and (3) under the guidance of her own continuing-interpretation of the gospel-faith (which is to say 'under tradition'). All three influences are simultaneously necessary and reciprocally interrelated such that we have one theological norm in their conjoined reciprocity. This norm gives new breadth to the *sola scriptura* principle by interpreting it according to the positive (developmental) understanding of the *semper reformanda*. One question has been left unanalyzed for the last chapter. What is to be developed (*reformanda*)? *In what* does the development consist? Can there be *real continuity* and *permanent achievement* within the developmental process? Can Catholic-substance be reconciled with the Protestant-principle?

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[81] Ibid., (italics ours).

[82] Dowey, A Commentary . . . , p. 29.

Revelation as Work or 'Doing'

Beyond the new breadth given to the cognitive-aspect of the revelation-process, the 1967 Confession gave new emphasis to revelation's 'work-action' aspect. In fact the entire functional approach of the Confession bears on this point. God's reconcil*ing* work in Christ continu*ing* in the reconcil*ing*-mission of the church are both 'revelational.' In the second part of the Confession we have an example of the new emphasis. The traditional 'preaching the word' by *speaking* is shifted to preaching by *action* (*living* reconciliation). The object shifts from merely 'message and truth' to also include 'person and life':

> To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as his reconcil*ing* community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares his labor of healing the enmities of mankind. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call.
>
> The life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ has set the pattern for the church's mission. His life as man involves the church in the common life of men. His service to men commits the church to work for every form of human well-being. . . .
>
> The church follows this pattern in the form of its life and in the method of its action. *So to live and serve is to confess Christ.*[83]

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[83] *B.C.*, 9.31 (italics ours).

In the introductory sentence--To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world--Dowey sees the force of the entire Confession. "The first phrase, to be reconciled to God," he claims "is a concentrated summary of Part I. The last part . . . , to be sent into the world as his reconciling community, epitomizes Part II. The verb is holds them together like a pin in a hinge."[84] Dowey gathers all under one rubric, viz., what it means for the church to confess Christ the Lord. "To call him Lord, to own up to him among men, to speak the gospel, and act toward others in this manner," he answers, "is to live and serve as a confessing Christian."[85] The gospel message for our day seems to be: confess by living and serving. The church is a mission, sent to witness to the message of reconciliation. The church is revelational.

This primary aspect of revelation as God's reconciling work redounds upon the cognitive-aspect of revelation in a most liberating way. It forces its extension and comprehension to include an amazing breadth of content and of witnesses by which the Spirit may transmit or 'tradition' the 'gospel' to the world. Finally it shows that the interrelationship between 'witness' and 'believing recipient' is such that the latter becomes witness in the very receiving of the revelation.

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[84] Dowey, A Commentary . . . , p. 112.

[85] Ibid., p. 114.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOME ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Three insights into the 'new' (actually the old) theology of revelation stand-out and demand our concluding reflections. This neo-orthodox theology developed the embryonic insights of Luther and Calvin who viewed revelation as far richer than Bible and its 'system of doctrine.' The insights were: (1) revelation as primarily an interpersonal encounter or event (Brunner more than Barth); (2) the infallible authority of revelation as residing ultimately in the Spirit with the human witnesses (including Scripture) sharing it only as the revelational moment (Barth more than Brunner); and (3) revelation as a dynamic process including the life and work of the church as well as the word. As a result of the rediscovery, revelation and reconciliation were seen as one. This epitomizing insight, borrowed by Calvin and Barth from II Corinthians, became the theme of the 1967 Confession.

The chapter will have two parts: first (A) we will consider the ecumenical implications of the 1967 Book of Confessions--reflections from the Protestant viewpoint; second (B) we will take some contemporary Catholic thought on revelation and authority--reflection from the Roman Catholic viewpoint.

A. REFLECTIONS FROM THE PROTESTANT VIEWPOINT

INTRODUCTION

A General Guide

'Foresight corrected by hindsight leads to insight.' We call upon Paul Minear's aphorism to guide our concluding reflections. Hindsight in our case besides including the beginnings of American Presbyterianism necessarily included the English and European reforms--indeed, the very 'spirit of reform' left to us by Christ and the early Christians. The Committee of Fifteen culminated a long struggle for the implementation of this reform-principle in the area of confessional development. Hindsight points us to the underlying continuity of their struggle with that of the Van Dykes, Briggs, and Jonathan Dickinson.

Hindsight

Before considering the contemporary Protestant thought on the revelation-authority problem one last look in hindsight will set up the problem. We choose the theology of Charles Briggs--who was the bridge from 'old' to new. Briggs realized that the key issue beneath the authority problem was Christian revelation. How was, and is, revelation passed down to man in a human-divine way, avoiding both the docetic and the ebionite extremes? His answer was to collect the three "human witnesses":

Bible, Church, and Reason, and put them securely under and in union with the authority of the Spirit. "The Spirit of God interprets to the Church not a new Christianity," Briggs said, "but the Christianity of Christ . . . Presbyterianism applies this test to all Christian history, and recognizes through all time the work of the Spirit . . . in the normal development of Christianity."[1] But the question left for Briggs is: how in the concrete is this 'test of the Spirit' applied? By whom, by what 'means,' with what processes is the discernment made?

Briggs' answer was again the triple witness--Bible, Church, and Reason--under the Spirit. But then started the struggle! The Scriptures are 'over' the Church simpliciter; hence they must be their own interpreter. And yet the church must interpret too. "Presbyterianism," he wrote, "does not recognize the authority of the Church to define infallibly . . . the teaching of Scripture. The Scriptures bear with them their infallible interpretation. . . . In their creeds [they] define the canon and interpret the Scriptures . . . [but] they may be in error."[2] At the same time Briggs rejected any semblance of bibliolatry. This left him with only the individual's power of reason and the Spirit. He recognized that the Spirit guides man to deduce the necessary consequences of Scripture. "The light of nature and Christian prudence," he said, "do not conflict with Scripture, but take place in subordination to the voice of the Spirit in the Scripture . . ."[3] But 'private interpretation' was still not sufficient,whence he opted (not without hesitation) for some role for the church's teaching body and for the 'communal consensus' (tradition). He saw the church as a mixture of good and evil, and insisted that all genuine church doctrine find its origin and authority in the words of Christ and the apostles. "It is necessary," he concluded, "to discriminate between the work of the Spirit in the Church and the work of the flesh."[4] And so we are back to our original statement: it is necessary to discriminate the work of the Spirit--and also to our original question: in the concrete, how discriminate?

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[1] Briggs, Hist., pp. 7-8.

[2] Ibid., p. 9.

Christians find common ground with Briggs on his doctrine of the Holy Spirit as ultimate authority, on his necessary development of doctrine from the one normative historical-Scriptural-record, and finally on the need for man (especially the official minister) to use his reason under the guidance of the Spirit and in so doing to build up a 'consensus' or 'tradition.' And all agree on the need to discern the work of the Spirit, and that this discernment must be at least partially up to each individual, that is, as far as his own faith is concerned. This narrows our original question considerably. In addition to the interrelationships already stressed, is there room for a definitive-participated-infallible discerning power--a gift to the church by the Spirit? This power would be another 'witness' to the gospel and means for the Spirit to use in his own 'moment' always in harmony with the other witnesses. It would be used with respect for the freedom of both Spirit and individual believer. Like all the other human witnesses (Bible, tradition, etc.) it would be an 'offering' and not an 'imposition.'

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[3] Ibid., pp. 9-11.

[4] Ibid., p. 5.

A Moment of Foresight

To situate the contemporary context of the authority problem we borrow a moment of foresight from Dr. Robert McAfee Brown. Sixty years after Briggs said 'no' to infallibility, Brown was asked the same question. The question was asked in two parts:

> [1] . . . Today almost all Christians agree that the Church wrote the New Testament. If the Church is always fallible, what assurance do we then have that our gospel is the true gospel of Jesus Christ?
>
> [2] . . . How does the Church listen to holy scripture? Who are her ears? Who decides what God is saying to her? What assurance does she have that she has heard the Word rightly?[5]

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[5] The National Catholic Reporter 3, No. 39 (Aug. 2, 1967), p. 2, cols. 2-4.

In answering part one Brown distinguished the central gospel-affirmation ('Christ is Lord') from the non-central. He allowed the central affirmation to be called an 'irreformable dogma.' He then posited the need for some kind of church-structure 'to determine who is properly saying Christ is Lord.' But, like Briggs, he injected a note of caution into his reply. Speaking of the 'Christ is Lord' affirmation he said:

> . . . So there is that basic affirmation. Now in one sense, I as a Protestant, say this is an irreformable dogma. That is to say, I cannot conceive of the Christian Church deciding one day that Christ is not Lord, that somebody else is Lord. At this point, I think, Protestants and Catholics are very, very close.
>
> Beyond that, the more one tries to spell out the implications of Christ's being Lord, the more one has to have a certain caution. To say Christ is Lord . . . means sooner or later that I am drawn into fellowship with others who make that claim. This means some kind of structure has to guide the deliberations . . . , some kind of system for determining who is properly saying Christ is Lord. Some kind of teaching authority gradually builds up.
>
> The further we get away from the basic affirmation . . . the more we have to realize that human judgments and human corruptions will intrude. Therefore, for the sake of the purity of the fundamental Christian affirmation, one has to have the various structures that surround it always open to scrutiny and criticism.[6]

To the second part of the question--Who decides for the church what God is saying to her? And what assurance does she have that she has heard the Word rightly?--Brown admits that

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[6] *Ibid*.

Catholicism has 'the tidier answer' and also that the Protestant answer allowed for a teaching office. But he still saw problems with an infallible teaching office. "The problem today, which I think the Vatican Council also came to terms with is," he writes, "that sometimes those who interpret, interpret wrongly, or at least interpret without seeing full nuances of what is there."[7] Thus Brown repeats the answer given by Briggs. He mentions all the witnesses, but stops short of an infallible 'discerning power.'

This brings us to the specific question about the Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility. The question to Brown had three parts:

> [1] You have written often about the problem of authority as the key ecumenical issue. Let me ask first about how we can profitably discuss Catholic teaching on infallibility. . . . For Protestants the doctrine of papal infallibility raises an issue of idolatry. Is that correct?
>
> [2] Are you saying that because of the Catholic Church's claim to infallibility, to the Protestant the Catholic Church does not seem to subject herself completely to the word which God speaks to her?
>
> [3] To what extent do you think the work of Vatican II . . . will help to answer this basic Protestant criticism?[8]

In his response Brown brings out the Protestant fear: what will insure us that the pope will stay within the bounds of the limitations set upon his infallibility. In other words must there not be 'some system of check and balance,' or is the pope unable to 'sin against his office?' In response to part one Brown explains that until recently it seemed that the Catholic view exempted their teaching authority from the authority of scripture. "There is judgment in many places, but there is a point in the life of the Church that is invulnerable to divine judgment:" he says, "namely, that a man at a certain point, under certain conditions, can speak in the untainted accents of the Holy Ghost, beyond the possibility of human error, beyond the need for a kind of teaching that is to be reformed . . ."[9] The real issue, as we shall see, is not whether man can so speak, but whether the Spirit can do so through man.

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[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

The crucial second question--whether the Catholic Church in her using of infallibility could be derogating from the power of the Word--could be approached in another way. Is it possible for the Word of God through his Spirit to give a charism to the church's teaching body consisting of a discerning and declaring power? Concerning the question of possibility Brown would probably answer 'yes,' but to the question of fact--that God has revealed the promise of such a charism (directly or implicitly)--he would give an implicit 'no' (while not directly answering). In answering the question as asked Brown speaks only of the possibility for error. (We take him to mean an all-inclusive possibility--thus excluding infallibility.) "The Church which is called upon to be the vehicle through which the word of God comes to men," he says, "can in principle, at least, intrude between that word of God and man. It can let its own judgments . . . come to be equated with the pure word of God . . ."[10]

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[9] Ibid.

The entire dialogue shows clearly that the real problem of definitive Church infallibility is simply one of whether or not God has revealed (implicitly or explicitly) the promise of such a power to his church. It would seem that for those who answer affirmatively the majority would opt for the implicitness of this revelation--namely, that if God's promise to be with his church did not include this special power, then the meaning of His promise would be empty. In cases like this, and most especially this one, man the believer must search amid prayerful-doubt. To search man should know exactly what is being proposed for belief. Beyond this is the need for an 'apologetic' to make the particular revelation 'credible.' Even then only a free gift of the Spirit can enable him to reach-out through the doubt and the obscurity. As in all acts of faith only a unique individual can respond to a unique personal offering.

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[10] *Ibid.*

An 'apologetic' for infallibility will be developed in the second part of the chapter (Catholic reflections). But a significant lead has been given by Dr. Brown. He spoke of the 'implications of Christ being Lord.' Sooner or later, he said, this means some kind of community, some kind of 'structure to guide deliberations' and some kind of 'system for determining who is properly saying Christ is Lord.' Infallibility will always be rooted in the community of Christ the Lord (and of his Spirit), for all charism and grace is rooted in and comes from the risen Christ. And he is in his community and they are 'in him.' Thus one of the primary witnesses of revelation will be the church 'community' itself. Revelation-faith is given to the individual, but always somehow in a communal-ecclesial 'locus.' Our faith is in Christ; but Christ's presence must now be experienced 'in his Body,' the Church. Consequently it must be from the implications about this community that infallibility (in general and in particular) is discovered. In general it will be connected with 'the divinely intended meaning' of his promise to be with us always.

Brown's response to part three of the infallibility question describes Vatican II's clarification of Vatican I that reassured the Christian world that the Catholic Church had not become a one-man-affair. Vatican II, he noted, gave reassurance in two ways: (1) the *council* was clearly recognized as an instrument of renewal and reform (showing there are always better ways that divine truth can be expressed); and (2) the doctrine of collegiality made a significant advance. "Vatican II, while it hedges with a good deal of cautionary language," he wrote, "is clearly saying now that teaching authority . . . is vested *in the whole episcopate*. The Pope . . . is head of the college . . ., but he acts not solely in his own name but in the name of all his fellow bishops."[11]

Brown's insights will be further developed in the following ecumenical reflections. For now we again leave the infallibility discussion open-ended. The Spirit witnesses in many ways and the believer struggles to be open to all of them. His freedom is not an absolute. The more he finds its true nature, the more he discovers that freedom's essence is to give itself away in a definite way--the way of response and responsibility.

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[11] *Ibid*.

DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT
AND THE 1967 CONFESSION

The Problem

As background for the doctrinal development problem we studied the neo-orthodox theology of revelation. Here it was seen that what had to be united and harmonized were the Word's sovereign freedom and the human witness. This began with the humanity of Christ and ran through the entire historico-temporal complexus of the revelational-traditional process (Bible, preaching, theology, life, etc.). God chose to infallibly reveal Himself through human means. Man the believer had to listen with human ears and respond with human heart and mind. How and to what extent does God's infallible-revelation transmit itself as infallible when communicated through human-fallible-media? Does the divine infallibility somehow touch, elevate, or incarnate itself in the human-historical-temporal witness (starting with the humanity of Christ)? These are the unanswered (possibly unanswerable) questions to which the concluding reflections must address themselves.

The 'sovereignty principle'--the preoccupation of Barth and Calvin--correctly places revelation's ultimate authority (power) in the transcendently free decision of God. Revelation is a unique gift of 'encounter' or 'event'--unique for each individual. The 'moment' (kairos) for revelation lies totally beyond the individual's own power. The dangers lie in false escapes from this total dependence, especially those identifying the human-historical-incarnate *means of witness* with the revelation itself. Paul Minear used the *temporal*-historical symbol, the kairos, to express the problem, and in terms of it he spelled-out two traditional dangers. (1) Man could treat revelation as something *strictly* 'past.' He could then 'adjust himself more comfortably to the present.' Or (2) he could treat it as a strictly 'future promise.' In this way the immediate urgency of salvation was removed. He cites the extreme legalists and extreme apocalyptists of Jesus' day. "But those who confronted God's kairos in full contemporaneity of revelation and full imminence of redemption, and who, in response, yielded their hearts' deepest longings in repentance and trust," he concluded, "must accept the bent spring as a necessary concomitant of their situation."[12] The spring can break at any moment. In the face of this radical divine freedom we have the revelation of the Christian mystery of the Incarnation. God has freely chosen to reveal himself to us in our human-language (or human 'word'). The primal revelation is Christ, the Word-become-human. The revelation continues in our own time through the Spirit.

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[12] Paul Minear, *Eyes of Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 127.

As a corrollary to the 'sovereignty principle' the neo-orthodox evolved the distinction between 'the primary faith moment' (the encounter with God) and 'the secondary moment' (the truth revealed about God). A problem arose about 'secondary faith' (which was reflected in the 1967 Confession): is there any real authoritative value to this faith which, as humanly received, must be 'propositional?' Is there any reliable 'truth value' to the 'something about God,' or for that matter can we speak of any real 'something-truth' (as opposed to 'someone truth') in our knowledge about God? This is to ask our key question the third time. Whether it is asked in terms of infallibility, the incarnation-principle, or true 'objective-knowledge' about God, it always asks the same thing: what happens to us 'knowledge-wise' when God reveals himself to us?

Searching for the Answer

1. The Doctrinal-Truth Question

In the face of difficulties posed by the human-witnessing-media--such as the historical-critical difficulties in the case of Scripture--one readily sympathizes with the chary attitude of not wanting to fall again into the mistake of orthodoxism (whether biblical or ecclesiastical). An equal pressure exists to avoid the 'mysticism and spiritualism' so assiduously shunned by the Reformers (over-assiduously by some of the scholastics). The conclusion was that there must be some revealed-truth about God (trinity, incarnation, etc.) but that the 'objectivity' of this revelation had its definite limitations and obscurities. These limitations were often overlooked in man's enthusiasm for the security of 'objective-knowledge.' 'Faith-knowledge' however lends itself by its very nature to a security-insecurity tension. The neo-orthodox 'dialectic' or 'paradox' tried to give a good working rule: the closer one is to the 'primary faith encounter' (Christ the Word revealing the Father's reconciling love) the more secure is his faith. Although this recognizes our doctrinal poverty, it should not stunt our theological wonder nor its labor. Theology responds to the call to share in the apostolic-apologetic of the Spirit's reconciling mission. This includes a doctrinal message.

The God who Acts also explains and interprets His Acts. This is the only kind of 'communication' people can comprehend. If biblical language is not 'dogmatic' neither is it free from all objective communication. "On a priori grounds," argues Vincent Taylor, "there is no compelling reason why Revelation should be found in 'mighty acts' of God, but not in words. Indeed, words can be a better medium of communication than events which need to be explained."[13] Lest it be exaggerated Taylor's affirmation should be qualified. The 'words explaining events' often involve vague 'symbols,' 'metaphors,' and 'myths.' Their objective meaning is often very minimal and certainly inadequate. Our Lord's own explanations were often cross-referenced to his actions:" . . . Even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:38 RSV). Consequently, neo-orthodoxy is closer to describing the almost ineffable revelation than 'dogmatism' or 'supernatural rationalism.' The key word is the adverb 'almost.' It signifies the tenuous balance that must be held between the primary and secondary elements of the revelation-faith process.

We summarize and conclude with a paradox within our paradox. In trying to measure the 'almost,' Catholic and Protestant theologians have sometimes criss-crossed--with the Catholic becoming the defender of the 'primary aspect of faith' while the Protestant defends the 'secondary.' Thus in speaking of the difficulty with the objectivity of dogmatic statements the Catholic Avery Dulles affirms that God's truth cannot be reduced to the dead-letter of any doctrinal statement. He is careful to add however that such statements may become God's revelatory word. The discourse on 'dogmatics'

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[13] Vincent Taylor, "Religious Certainty II," The Expository Times, 72 (Nov. 1960), p. 51.

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of another Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, sounds very much like that of Brunner. "It [dogma] has an almost sacramental function," he says, "transmitting not the idea, but the reality of God's outpouring . . . It transcends the subject-object schema of ordinary propositional discourse, and cannot be rightly apprehended without personal appropriation."[14] To all this Dulles adds the "balancing" conclusion:

> I do not wish to imply, of course, that in religion anything goes, or that all the formulas of all the Churches can be thrown together into some great theological mishmash . . .
>
> In the last analysis, I suspect, there are no adequate extrinsic norms for measuring the validity of confessional statements. They cannot be tested against other biblical or creedal utterances by merely syllogistic logic. The norm must be to some extent existential . . .
>
> . . . The fact that the dogmas of different Christian groups seem to conflict should not turn us against dogma itself. The conflicts are partly due to the faultiness of the ecclesiastical statements, many of which are in urgent need of reformulation, and partly also to the ineffable richness of revelation, which defies compression into compact formulas . . .[15]

We will explore Dulles' thought further in the second section of this chapter. For now he simply confirms that the problem of 'dogmatic formulation' does effect Catholic theology too.

On the Protestant side of our criss-cross we again cite John Thomas. Although he blames the Kierkegaardian irrationalism of dialectical theologians as being at variance with 'a revelation amenable to human cognition and verbal expression' and as implicitly rejecting the Scriptural record, he nevertheless opts for Brunner's 'divine-human encounter' as primary to faith--minus, however, its corrollary of incommunicability. If we analyze the experience of human-communion, he argues, we find that no personal-encounter can take place without perception and judgment and the apprehension of truth in propositional form. He cites Richard Niebuhr and S. Bulgakoff in his support. "It cannot be enough ," writes Niebuhr, "to say that in revelation we meet the divine self, for if this meeting is pure immediacy which does not provide us with truths about God it would remain incommunicable and unable to provide the reasoning heart with principles of understanding."[16] Thus there is a real 'meeting' in and through the communication of some 'truth-value.' In faith we cannot know God with 'pure immediacy,' but only through the veil of human language. Like the adverb 'almost' now the adjective 'some' is a very relative term. Its measure depends from which of the two relata one takes his viewpoint: God-the-Revealer or man-the-believer.

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[14] Avery Dulles, "Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem" Theological Studies, 29 (1968), pp. 402-03 (italics ours).

[15] Ibid., pp. 415-16 (italics ours).

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[16] John N. Thomas, "Authority of the Bible," Theology Today 3 (1946), p. 164, with citations from Richard Niebuhr (The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 175-76) and S. Bulgakoff (in Baille's Revelation, p. 139).

2. The 'Infallibility-Irreformability' Question

The second doctrinal question left open in our previous study was that of infallibility, especially the infallibility of God's revelation as communicated through human language. In its broad sense[17] infallibility involves 'permanency versus changeability,' 'reformability versus irreformability,' 'continuity versus discontinuity,' and 'possibility versus impossibility of error.' Given that in revelation God infallibly communicates Himself and something about Himself to man, may we, and to what extent may we, attribute this 'infallibility' and 'irreformability' to the human media and to the human doctrinal expression? Is there any possible reconciliation between the Protestant 'semper reformanda' and the Catholic 'quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus?' Only in the advent of an affirmative response can we have a consensus on the meaning of 'true doctrinal development.'

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[17] Thus far the terms 'infallibility' and 'irreformability' have been undistinguished. It will be important subsequently to distinguish them. 'Infallibility' denotes the gift or power to discern (hear) and communicate (teach) truth unerringly. Thus it is primarily attributable to people (individually or communally). By connotation it is attributed to the 'truth' or 'doctrine' enunciated infallibly. The more accurate term, however, for a 'divinely intended unchangeable truth' is irreformability. Presently infallibility is used interchangeably for both the subjective-power and for its corresponding objective-truth. A final clarification will be attempted in the second-section of this chapter.

First glance and many glances tell us we are at an impasse. Dowey, for example, seems to hold that the 'reformanda-infallibility' antinomy is exclusive--and he opts for the reformanda. He does this while paying full respect to tradition. "The church that denies tradition," he affirms, "deludes and impoverishes itself. The way into the future . . . leads out of the actual past."[18] He is equally insistent in applying 'reformanda' to all tradition and in interpreting this to mean no infallibility. "No single document," he asserts, "is adequate for all history, nor is any such statement infallible. A statement that is appropriate and powerful in its own day may fail to guide the church after some decades or centuries have gone by."[19] Dowey's more fundamental description of 'reformanda' is positive, and leaves some ambivalence with regard to his final meaning of no-infallibility. Reformanda is described in terms of 'openness to testing' by Word and Spirit without making any prejudgment on truth or error: "The test of a confession is not how it conforms to type or . . . style, but whether it brings the church actually to express in words the meaning of the gospel in contemporary life."[20] Barth came to the same positive expression, and indentifies the ultimate criterion of this testing:

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[18] Report . . . , p. 22.

[19] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[20] Ibid., p. 20.

> . . . If theology did not take seriously the tradition of the community in the form of these documents of conflict, it would not be service in and for the community . . . It must take note how one thing was occasionally defined and proclaimed as right and another anathematized as wrong magno consensu . . . of the fathers, during times of the beclouding of the Christian witness . . .
>
> Nevertheless, the significance of tradition may not be simply taken for granted . . . No dogma or article of the creed can be simply taken over untested by theology from ecclessiastical antiquity; each must be measured . . . by the Holy Scriptures and the Word of God . . .[21]

Thus for Dowey and Barth reformanda (non-infallibility) means: we can't be sure of any humanly formulated confession, doctrine, or dogma in itself (untested by Word and Spirit). It is always the Word and Spirit who have the sovereign power of control over revelation. It may never be usurped by man, nor by his doctrine. But all this still leaves the question for Barth and Dowey (as it did for Briggs and Brown): what, if any, is the human-divine process for testing and discerning? The 'infallibility-question' may be posed as a three-horned dilemma. The meaning of God's gospel-revelation--the interpretative goal of all Christian confession and doctrine--must be: (1) either totally incomprehensible to human understanding (even when enlightened by the Spirit); or (2) essentially changeable; or (3) partially, but infallibly (changelessly), communicated to human understanding.

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[21] K. Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction, pp. 45-46.

Dowey from the logic of his written works would not seem to admit of an infallible-meaning-of-the-revelation as humanly understood (although in the last chapter he did speak of both permanence and transience as characteristic of creeds). Even were one to carefully qualify and limit the question to certain core doctrines or dogmas (in line with McAfee Brown's thought), Dowey shies away from attributing 'infallibility' to them. One difficulty appears to be his failure to distinguish between 'formulation' and 'meaning.' (This important distinction will be discussed by Fr. Dulles in the second part of this chapter.) We suspect however that Dowey's basic difficulty with infallibility (and its correlate of irreformability) goes deeper. It is again the issue of whether or not 'infallibility' is a part of God's revelation. Hendry comprehends the dilemma, leaves it as such, and urges further reflection. The authority of the Holy Spirit he says must be distinguished from the authority of any doctrine or system. His problem of course is how this can be done (without dissolving doctrinal authority altogether). "The only way . . . it [the dilemma] can be overcome," he suggests, "is by a re-examination . . . of the role of doctrine (in all its forms) in the maintenance of the vitality of the Church and its solidarity in the Spirit."[22]

From the Protestant viewpoint, therefore, the infallibility problem remains a dilemna (or at least ambivalent). To have true doctrinal development (including interpretation of Scripture) infallibility seems necessary; but human infallibility seems to threaten the Spirit's sovereign freedom. Hendry calls this the 'thralldom of doctrine:'

> There can be no escape from *the thralldom of doctrine* except by a great act of faith in the Holy Spirit as the author of vitality and solidarity as well as authority. Only in the context of such an act will it be possible to grasp and entertain the thought that doctrine is always incommensurate--and incommensurable--with the reality to which it refers, that it can never be more than an approximation to the truth (as Gregory of Nyssa said once long ago), and that only by the action of the Holy Spirit can it be a vessel and vehicle of the truth. . . . Apart from[this] . . . context, . . . [what has been said] will almost be viewed as skepticism, relativism, indifferentism or something of the sort. It is extremely hard, especially in argument with those who take this view, not to be forced into the position of conceding the *insurmountable* authority of some doctrinal formulation, even if it be one as minimal as the original formulation of the World Council of Churches. Yet the *authority* of the *Holy Spirit cannot be delegated to any doctrinal formula*, however central or sacrosanct.[23]

Again we notice Hendry's failure to distinguish between formula and meaning. The authority of infallibility is not primarily 'delegated to any doctrinal formula' but to believers in the community of the Spirit. Infallibility is basically a part of the charism of faith. It is attributed to doctrinal statements only by connotation. There is also no doubt about doctrine's incommensurateness with the divine reality; the question is whether or not it is totally incommensurate. Before turning to the Catholic viewpoint on the infallibility question (and its positive apologetic) some ecumenical reflections on the 1967 Confession's polity changes will be heard. They have reflected much light onto our basic inquiry into revelation theology.

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[22] G. S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (2nd ed. rev. and enl., Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1965), p. 153.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 153-54.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DOCTRINAL IMPLICATIONS OF POLITY DEVELOPMENT

The changes in the Form of Government or polity reflect, indirectly at least, changes in ecclesiology (especially in the theology of church authority). This is, of course, vitally connected with the theology of doctrinal development. Together with the doctrine from the Confession proper the polity changes offered a dynamic ecclesiology in which the church is envisioned functionally as the community of the Spirit whose work is essentially the ministry of the revelational message of reconciliation.[24]

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[24] Arthur Cochrane, (*art. cit.* in *McCormick Quarterly* 19 [Jan. 1966], p. 141) is rather strong in insisting on the distinction between Christ's once and for all part in reconciliation, and so he calls the Church's mission the ministry of the *message* of reconciliation.

Church Authority in the Ministry of the Message

Once set free from ecclesiasticism and biblicism the Protestant theologians began to ask what authority the church did have. They were to discover the answer in the actual exercise of the church's 'ministry of the message.' Until this discovery, Thomas tells us, there had been a "blind spot caused by their zeal against Rome [such] that the Reformers did not discern the authority in their own practice and teaching."[25] Though not explicitly enunciated by the 1967 Confession the new change in authority was a direct implication of the de-emphasis on the narrow sense of the sola-scriptura.

Thomas exemplifies the importance of the re-discovery of church authority by relating it to the perennial Protestant perplexity over the 'establishment of the canon.' (Even Barth as late as 1962 made this a 'theological presupposition.') He argues that the same Scriptural authority that accords the right of each individual to find his own private canon also applies to the church concerning the discovery of her public canon. He writes:

> Thus their doctrine of the authority of Scripture in the Church implies a correlative authority on the part of the Church to determine the limits of the authentic Scripture. The justification of this authority stems from the fact

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[25] J. N. Thomas, art. cit., p. 170.

> that the Church's action reflects the collective witness of the Spirit through the centuries. Because hers is the collective judgment, the Church has the right and the obligation to maintain her own canon as a check and guide for the individual in his personal response to the Scriptures: Her right is limited only by the obligation, also basic to Protestantism, that she grant the individual freedom to test the Scriptures for himself and advocate through democratic processes a modification of the official canon.[26]

This conclusion on the role of church relative to the 'canon' has its obvious applications to all theological problems. The authoritative interpretation of (discernment of) the canon is only the first step in the overall task of interpretation. In interpretative-authority Thomas sees the substitute for verbal inspiration as well as the guarantee of scriptural authority against 'rationalizing and mystical influences.' "The Church's authority as determiner of the canon," he says, ". . . is the rightful heritage of evangelical Protestantism both because it is true to the facts and because it is the correlate, hitherto unrealized, of the Reformer's principle of authority."[27]

Actually Thomas' theology of authority echoes the 'reciprocal authority principle' already seen in Briggs, Dowey, and Hendry. But he spells-out the church's role. The church's task is to 'determine,' 'recognize,' or 'discern' certain Scriptures as normative. It does this by virtue of the principle of 'collective judgment' or 'the collective witness of the Spirit.' The church has a right and duty to confess this 'consensus doctrine' in answer to her own call by the Spirit. Thomas' second key principle regarding the church's role was that of respect for the individual's freedom under the Spirit. The church's confession is never to be imposed, but to be offered as a guide for one's own confession. No one should usurp the freedom of the Spirit to give the gift of faith 'when and where He pleases.' Applying these principles to our ecumenical problem one can ask if there might not be more common ground (1) if these principles of freedom--both of Spirit and of individual--were more clearly articulated by the Roman Church, and (2) if the 'duty' of the Church to 'discern true doctrine'--with its necessary structures and charism (especially infallibility)--was more thoroughly investigated by the Protestants.

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[26] Ibid., pp. 160-70.

[27] Ibid., p. 171.

Authority of Church-Doctrine: Tradition

Dr. Richard Drummond (University of Wisconsin) offers a more recent synthesis of the three reciprocal authority-factors in terms of a 'living-tradition.' This notion of living tradition brings us again to the problem of doctrinal development and irreformability. Drummond saw three 'reciprocal coefficients' interracting and checking one another: (1) Scripture, (2) individual experience of redemption and revelation, and (3) the corporate life of the whole community in continuity with its past. To the 'community as a whole' was given the apostolic tradition or 'memory of the normative acts of God in Christ.' But this tradition was a living and growing thing because Christ continues to indwell and reveal himself to his church. Thus there is a primary or normative tradition (Scripture) and a subsequent or secondary tradition. "The Bible," Drummond concludes, "in conjunction with the personal experience and corporate life of God's people under the discipline of the Holy Spirit, comes to constitute one functional norm of Christian life."[28]

To Thomas' emphasis on the church's role in authority Drummond has now added the unifying principle, the 'dynamic traditioning process.' Within this process besides the overall authority of the Spirit he stressed the 'individual-communal' reciprocity. Our final question to Thomas, however, might be askedof Drummond as well: what charism is needed by the church in order that she might discern true tradition (primarily the Scriptures)? And two further questions might now be added: how is this charism distributed as far as individual and corporate life are concerned ? and how does the individual Christian's freedom operate under the Spirit's charism to the church? The discussion of these questions must form a part of the apologetic for 'participated-infallibility.'

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[28] Richard H. Drummond, "Authority in the Church: An Ecumenical Inquiry," The Journal of Bible and Religion 34 (Oct. 1966), pp. 329-45.

A Note on 'Tradition and Traditions'

The 1967 Confession did not adopt any official notion of 'tradition,' but the very adoption of a new Book of Confessions along with the professed motivation for the new Confession makes the notion of 'living-tradition' (more verb than noun) one of its obvious implicates. A note on the contemporary Protestant thought on tradition will set the stage for our Catholic reflections.

At Montreal (1963) the Faith and Order Commission chose the topic 'Tradition and Traditions.' Dr. Albert Outler was chairman. He reports that something remarkable happened at Montreal when one of the Conference sections were so taken by the fact that 'all Christians live in a tradition that goes back to the Lord' that it was proposed that we all exist *sola traditione*. "Tradition in this sense," Outler notes, "includes the preaching of the Word and worship, Christian teaching and theology, missions, and also witness to Christ in the lives of members of the Church."[29] Though the 'sola traditione' phrase was left out of the final report the incident indicates how far Protestantism has moved from the uncritical use of the sola scriptura term.

The major practical contribution of the Montreal Commission was the creation of a challenging terminology. Tradition (capital T) was used to signify the Gospel itself testified to in Scripture. By tradition (small t) the 'traditionary process' was indicated. Finally traditions (the plural) referred to the various confessional and cultural traditions and the different forms of expression.[30] Outler calls Tradition 'constitutive tradition' and the last mentioned traditions (plural) he calls 'interpretative tradition.'[31] He develops the distinction as follows:

> Scripture alone is "the locus of traditio constitutiva with its power of stimulus and control in the development of the traditiones interpretivae in the historical experience of the Christian community."

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[29] Bela Vassady, "The Pre-Vatican II Theological Climate: C) In Protestantism," Theology and Life, 9 (1966), p. 330, citing "Report on Scripture, Tradition, and Traditions," The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal 1963, P. C. Rodger and Lukas Vischer eds. (N.Y.: Association Press, 1964), pp. 24-25.

[30] See ibid., p. 129, citing "Report . . .," supra cit., p. 50.

[31] Gabriel Moran (Scripture and Tradition) and most recent Roman-Catholics would make a further distinction concerning traditio constitutiva, applying it to the pre-scriptural phase of "oral tradition" or "primitive kerygma" and "sayings." Scripture is the written record of this tradition.

> Scripture . . . needs to be interpreted. This happens in and through the traditionary process, the process of hearing, believing and transmitting. It is a steadily on-going historical process which, however, not only separates us from, but _also connects us with_, the aboriginal Christ-event . . . The Holy Spirit always uses the history of the Church as a medium for His actions.[32]

Thus if Thomas has given us the church's reciprocal role in the authority process and Drummond has added the unifying principle of tradition, Outler has now given us the key to this traditioning-process. It must be interpretative of Scripture in an ongoing historical process. All three stressed the role of the Spirit. Now we must turn to the final question, the most difficult: _in concreto_ how does this interpretative traditioning process work?

Who is the Trustee of Tradition

The crux to the whole traditioning-revelational process is expressed in question-form by Outler: "Who may rightly function as trustee of a church's tradition . . .?[33] He sees the irony in the question in that "the guardians of the Christian Tradition have become the disparate guardians of disparate traditions, discordant trustees of a disrupted household of faith."[34] In answering Outler brings together one final time all of the reciprocal factors of the authority process and pushes them to their last step--to the proximate authoritative agency within the church's traditioning process, the teaching body. In one sense he says that the church teacher is the Holy Spirit; in another the Scriptures; and in still another the *consensus fidelium* (the priesthood of all the believers). "But in practise, the proximate agency of the *church's magisterium*," he adds, "is the *authorized ministry*. Therefore, the reconstruction of a unified ministry is inseparably connected with the whole issue of Revelation . . . And ultimately, all this will have to lead us into the realm of ecclesiology, a reconsideration of the Church's nature, mission and ministry."[35] Just how far this re-analysis of the church must go Outler has explained in one of his latest statements. Ecclesiology he says looks to two communities: the *koinonia of redemption* and the *koinonia of authority*. But Protestantism has *not* joined the two, preferring to locate authority in Scripture alone and to locate redemption in a community conceived of as the 'invisible church.' But where and how is Scriptural authority determined?

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[32] Vassady, _art. cit._, 327, citing Outler, "Scripture, Tradition, and the Guardian of Tradition," _Digest of the Proceedings of the Consultation on Church Union for 1962 and 1963_, Vols. I and II combined; p. 95, and also referring to his book _The Christian Tradition_, pp. 39, 54.

[33] _Ibid_., p. 328, citing "Scripture, Tradition, and the Guardian of Tradition," _art. cit_. (in previous note), pp. 88-89.

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[34] *Ibid*., citing Outler, *art. supra cit*., p. 94.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 329, citing Outler's *art. supra cit*., p. 89.

Is there any possible court of appeal other than that of the ecclesial community? Protestant hermeneutics he insists must get beyond its present triflings with 'canons within the classical canon' and develop a 'truly biblical hermeneutics' that 'includes the church as the matrix of truth and of salvation.' "Subjective certainty is _not_ a viable norm," Outler concludes, "nor are theological fads . . . Thus _the question of 'the infallibility of the church' has taken on new poignancy_ as a problem for Protestant theology, and, curiously enough, this coincides with a new nervousness about this same problem . . . by Roman Catholics."[36]

Conclusions

Outler alligns himself with Brown in espousing a radical Protestant search into ecclesiology--including the 'koinonia of authority' and the charism of infallibility. Here they seem to be joined by Hendry. He left the doctrinal problem as a problem and asked: can there be and how can there be a _human_ church whose doctrine has an infallible authority? In openly questioning 'with a favorable bias' an infallible human church with certain irreformable doctrine, Outler, Brown, and (to a lesser degree) Hendry went beyond Dowey,

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[36] Albert Outler, "Vatican II and Protestant Theology in America," _Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal_, (ed. by John H. Miller, International Theological Conference, Univ. of Notre Dame; Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1966), pp. 623-24.

Barth, Brunner and Calvin. But even their doctrine on authority was left enigmatic. No set of historical doctrinal statements can in themselves (independent of the moment of faith) claim any irreformable and infallible truth-value. The enigma enters when it comes to explaining what happens to Scripture or to doctrinal tradition in the moment of faith when they 'become the Word of God' for the believer. Can there be a body of interpretative doctrine (tradition) which shares in the type of 'permanency' and 'irreformability' that Scriptures do? Might not an affirmative answer be harmonizable with the semper reformanda positively understood? The 1967 Confession cannot be said to go beyond the reaffirmation of the 'always pilgrim' and 'semper reformanda' principle, but it can be said to have rediscovered the basic positive spirit of this principle--openness to the Holy Spirit.

By way of a summary statement to this'always pilgrim and total semper-reformanda' approach to doctrinal development we listen to Princeton Theological's Otto Piper. He begins with the 'Outler-question,' but his answer takes a different direction. He begins with the Protestant problem: Rome sees the Holy Spirit at work in the very living voice of the church, especially her teaching body, while Protestantism faces the accusation of 'subjectivism' and the proliferation of denominations. He rejects any solution by 'clever ecclesiastical organization' as well as by a unity based exclusively upon the ecumenical Councils of the Eastern Orthodox or the infallibility of the Pope. For Piper neither of these can be reconciled with the 'centrality of personal faith' which he calls the essential feature of Protestantism. In the face of disagreements in biblical interpretation (while holding firm to the essential principle of personal faith) he concludes that 'diversity must be accepted as an inherent implication of the Protestant principle.' "The only legitimate way toward genuine unity in theology," he states, "starts from the assurance that theological differences have their roots in the fact that Christ reveals himself to believers in a personal way."[37] Christians have their essential unity, therefore, not in doctrine, but in their 'willingness to subordinate their wills to the realization that the risen Lord is himself present in the church.'

In Piper we have an echo of the Brunner-Barth (Calvin-Dowey) emphasis on the 'primary personal faith' with minimal or no emphasis given to the 'secondary doctrinal faith.' But might not his understandable emphasis on the Protestant 'personal freedom principle' be integrated into a broader theology of revelation and epistemology of faith? Piper is right when he rejects a unity based exclusively on papal infallibility or on the Orthodox Councils. This would be irreconcilable with Protestant personalism before the Holy Spirit. But if our research up to this point has shown anything it has pointed toward the non-exclusivity of any single criterion, showing rather the mutual-reciprocality of the previously supposed irreconcilables. Can not 'infallibility' and 'irreformability,' be so conceived as to include also 'fallibility' and 'reformability'--and above all 'personal freedom?' And might not personal freedom and the sovereign freedom of the Spirit be capable of operating in a context of communal-consensus and a koinonia of authority--especially if these latter offices are looked upon as 'service offerings' and 'potential witnesses,' not as instruments of 'imposition?' The second part of this chapter will inquire whether such a development is possible from the Roman side.

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[37] Otto A. Piper, "Protestant Theology's Predicament," Theology Today 20 (1963-64), pp. 481, 483-85.

B. REFLECTIONS FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEWPOINT

INTRODUCTION

Our reflections from the Roman Catholic viewpoint will be guided by our study of the 1967 Confession. The three insights into the neo-orthodox theology of revelation which formed the theological climate for the 1967 Confession were also having a profound influence on Roman Catholic theology. Comparable to the Reformed rethinking of orthodox-biblicism was the Roman rethinking of her own orthodox-ecclesiasticism.

Revelation-faith was being viewed in its total personal setting and the authority problem was being re-analyzed in the light of the Spirit's ultimate freedom vis-a-vis the unique personal freedom of the individual believer. This was to have special pertinence for the infallibility-irreformability question. Finally the theology of life and work as 'revealing' (witnesses of and participants in the revelation mystery) was bringing a new breadth and a new life to the entire corpus of Catholic theology. 'Catholic neo-orthodoxy' was following in the footsteps of her Protestant predecessor. Once given freedom from her over-protective 'mosaic-forces' (the lingering fears of Modernism) her long-stifled 'abrahamic-forces' were to create a new biblical-theological renaissance culminating in Vatican II. The history of Catholicism, then, parallels and was influenced by the history of Protestantism.

There will be two main divisions to the following reflections. One will engage in comparative-ecumenical-symbolics, comparing pertinent sections of Vatican II with those of the 1967 Confession--concerning primarily the theology of revelation. The other will consider recent Catholic thought on the crucial issue of infallibility and reformability.

REVELATION AND VATICAN II

Introduction

While the Committee of Fifteen were formulating the 1967 Confession (starting in 1958), Vatican II was struggling through many similar reflections. Concerning the Catholic side Dulles writes: "The decade 1956-1966 is remarkable for dramatic advances in two important fields--the theology of revelation and the theology of ecumenism."[38] It would be difficult to imagine, he explains, what contemporary Catholic theology on the word of God would be without the revelation theology of Barth, Bultmann, Tillich and Cullman. Catholics came to recognize that the word even outside the juridical limits of Rome effectively awakened faith and created a community of faith. "Even when they are divided into separate ecclesiastical bodies," he wrote, "they are still intimately linked together inasmuch as they all listen to the word of God which comes to mankind, today as formerly, in Jesus Christ, the living and eternal Word."[39] As a concrete and significant illustration Dulles offers the relationship between Vatican II's _Constitution on Divine Revelation_ (_Verbum Dei_) and the _Decree on Ecumenism_.[40] The near tragic _Constitution on the Sources of_

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[38] A. Dulles, _Revelation and the Quest for Unity_ (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968, p. 15.

[39] _Ibid_., pp. 15-16.

[40] See _ibid_., p. 16.

Revelation was re-drafted at the personal request of Pope John under the co-presidencies of Cardinals Bea and Ottaviani. Bea was also president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the person chiefly responsible for the Decree on Ecumenism. The revised schema on Revelation explicitly recognized its ecumenical dimension, stating that the word of God is 'a powerful instrument in the mighty hand of God for attaining to that unity which the Saviour holds out to all men.' (n. 21,4)

In comparing Vatican II with the 1967 Confession three topics will be covered: (1) the nature of Revelation; (2) the epistemology of faith (authority) problem as it involves Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium; and (3) the Church and her "living-role" in revelation.

The Nature of Revelation

Vatican II's view of revelation has been characterized as Trinitarian, personalistic, Christocentric, and ecclesial.[41] The static-doctrinal view of Trent and Vatican I had been repeated in Vatican II's first draft until Pope John 'supplied the majority' for its rejection (the important day of November 21, 1962). Three years later (November 18, 1965) the amended draft was promulgated as the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Verbum Dei). Its opening paragraph moves far away from Vatican I's narrow propositional view. Its theme was taken from 1 John 1:2-3: "[We] proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father, and was made manifest to us [RSV]."[42] "Revelation is presented, not simply as a communication of knowledge," notes Dulles, "but as the dynamic process by which the divine persons invite men to enter into a relation of fellowship . . ."[43] Article two points out that the revelation is accomplished by the reciprocity of words and deeds, which harmonizes well with modern Protestant biblical theology. Gregory Baum, another Vatican expert, corroborates Dulles' interpretation of Vatican II's broad outlook saying that "according to conciliar teaching it is legitimate to call revelation that saving action of God by which the Father communicates Himself in the Church through the proclamation of His Word . . ."[44] From this Baum draws a significant conclusion: " . . . there is a sense in which the saving self-revelation of God continues to take place in the Church, even if the witness to this revelation . . . [has] been delivered to the apostolic Church once and for all . . ."[45]

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[41] See ibid., p. 57, citing Rene Latourelle's Theology of Revelation (New York: Alba House, 1966).

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[42] Ibid., p. 86.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Gregory Baum, O.S.A., "Vatican II's Constitution on Revelation: History and Interpretation," Theological Studies, 28 (1967), p. 61.

[45] Ibid.

This neglected dynamic (continuing) aspect of revelation has led to an even broader discovery. "It may still be asked," says Dulles, "whether God has not manifested Himself by deeds to other peoples too, and whether he has not continued to act in a revelatory way since apostolic times."[46] In answering he cites favorably Tillich's view of history:

> . . . Tillich's view that Church history is a living channel of revelation, punctuated by decisive kairoi, seems closer to Catholic doctrine than the narrow biblicist view that salvation history ceased with the age of the apostles. Such an existential "filling up" of Christ's revelation in the course of later centuries would, of course, add nothing substantially new--inasmuch as the essential meaning of all history has been finally disclosed in the Christ-event--but it would continue to actualize God's message in new forms, adapted to new situations.[47]

This dynamic view of an ongoing revelation wherein propositional-content is very secondary to the primary living encounter with God's present revealing action is rich with possibilities. We recognize the Barth-Brunner neo-orthodox influence. The most important application relates to the Protestant-Catholic problem of doctrinal development and its demonstration (if any!)--viz., the inferential-faith-connection between the primary historical revelation and the developed doctrine. Both sides admit to a certain 'alogical leap' concerning this process. In past theology Catholics fell back on the oversimplified use of an infallible magisterium and a nebulous 'Tradition' while Protestants simply denied human historical infallibility and resorted either to an immediate leap to the Spirit or to an uncritical use of the 'always pilgrim' and *semper reformanda*. Recent theology however has allowed us to ask hopefully: might not the far-less propositional revelation of the 'Christ-event' with its dynamic view of an 'ongoing process' lend itself to a greater integration of these *apparently* divergent views? It allows for historical-development while recognizing that even this development in the case of faith-revelation relies totally on the 'moment' of God's largess. There is no such thing as 'simple rational demonstration' concerning the interpretation and understanding of faith.

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[47] Ibid.

Gabriel Moran is one of the contemporary Catholic theologians who has developed this dynamic conception of revelation. He saw the former *impasse* on development in terms of an apparent dilemma. "Either revelation is constituted by events in the experience of men in the past and is *no longer with us*. . .;" he said, "or revelation consists of truths irrevocably tied to temporal events but communicable through propositions from one generation to another."[48] Rejecting both alternatives he offered a third. It lay in the reflective discovery of "the emergence of a *human consciousness* that is entirely receptive to God revealing and that *remains among men* to continue that revelation."[49]

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[48] Gabriel Moran, *Theology of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 56.

[49] *Ibid*.

This human-consciousness belonged to the humanity of Christ. Christ was the first recipient of the 'Christ-revelation,' and the fullness of revelation exists only in his glorified consciousness.[50] During his life there was a continuous growth in the revelation, whence we cannot be surprised that our own reception of revelation "means an imitation and a following of him on the road to obedience."[51] It was this way with the apostles, and it is this way now with us. The process is primarily a gradual sharing-in and following-of Christ's growth in consciousness. "The base of revelation," says Moran, "and the point to which our considerations must constantly return is the relation between Father and Son, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the apostolic sharing in the life and knowledge proper to the Son."[52]

But if Moran develops the ongoing-personal side of revelation he does not abandon the objective-propositional side: "Man cannot bring to reflexive awareness his lived truth without the mediation of objective expressions."[53] He does not want to repeat the modernist error wherein the "objective expression is a more or less detachable part not intrinsic to the experience itself."[54] Furthermore he opts for a 'qualitatively unique influence' upon the apostles and evangelists--to whom a 'deposit' was given in the sense of an objective-structure which guaranteed the revelational process "always being given by God and always being received by man."[55] It is at this point, in terms of his sophisticated understanding of 'faith-knowledge,' that Moran makes his contribution. The objectification of faith-knowledge took place in symbolic language which "indirectly expressed but never fully expressed what they desired to say."[56] "The expressed judgment," Moran says, "is a necessary but always incomplete objectification of man's experience of the revealing God, the objective expression helping to complete the experience while at the same time pointing beyond itself."[57] This is especially so when the judgments are personal, historical, and social, and more especially when they are about an interpersonal-love relationship. For here "words are intended to open out on life and communicate more than could ever be put in words."[58]

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[51] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[52] Ibid., p. 80.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

The Scriptures are, therefore, a norm for the future precisely while being past historical testimony of 'loving-faith' to Christ. In this sense Christian revelation becomes far more than what is 'in the book.' The true greatness of

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[55] Ibid., p. 91.

[56] Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[57] Ibid., p. 106.

[58] Ibid., p. 107.

Holy Scripture according to Moran "is not that it is something final; that which is final is the church growing into the fullness of Christ. The true greateness of Holy Scripture is that *it is a starting point*, an immovable foundation with which the Church must always remain in contact."[59] Revelation has to do with the *entire life of Christ and of his Church*, and Scripture *gives testimony to both* for the sake of continuing the life of both. This 'continuing *life* of the Church' is the full meaning of what we call 'tradition.' "What is *handed-over* in the Church *is the Church*."[60] This brings us to the second topic, the epistemology of faith in terms of (1) Tradition, (2) Scripture and (3) the *Magisterium*.

The Epistemology of Faith

1. Tradition

Verbum Dei took a dynamic view of *living* Tradition to parallel its dynamic view of revelation. In their commentary Roger Schutz and Max Thurian describe the basic usage of tradition in *Verbum Dei* as essentially "the act of the faithful relaying the Word of God."[61] Baum agrees:

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[59] *Ibid*., p. 108, citing Jean Levie, *The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1961), p. 278.

[60] *Ibid*., p. 109.

[61] Roger Schutz and Max Thurian, *Revelation, A Protestant View: The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, A Commentary* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1968), p. 43.

> . . . a deeper concept of tradition is presented in number 8. Tradition is more than *Traditio doctrinalis*, a teaching handed on in the Church. It is, rather, *traditio realis*, the real life of the Church, *including teaching*, worship, and other manifestations of the community. The gospel is thus daily transmitted in the Church through the faith and the faithful action of all her members. . . . The Holy Spirit so works in the Church endowed with the Scripture and other gifts that the life of the Church transmits the gospel and at the same time guarantees its authenticity. Thus the second chapter describes tradition as 'all that the Church is, all that she believes."[62]

In adopting this broad notion of tradition to match its broad notion of revelation (both as far *more* than *doctrinal teaching*) *Verbum Dei* 'bypassed' the age old problem of Scripture *and* Tradition as *two sources of doctrine*. But it did not *answer* the problem. There was an intentional refusal to further discuss and clarify the problem of '*doctrinal* tradition.'

The doctrinal-tradition problem asks whether there are *two quantitatively different* norms or sources for doctrinal content, Scripture *and* Tradition; or whether doctrinal tradition is *merely interpretative* of Scripture (thus presupposing Scripture as the unique norm). A *minority* of Fathers had petitioned that this issue be settled and that Scripture be affirmed as the unique content-norm (constitutive) such that all doctrinal tradition would be strictly interpretative. The request was refused and the issue of Scripture versus doctrinal-Tradition remained an 'open question'--as it had been since Trent. It is theoretically still possible according to Vatican II-teaching that doctrinal-Tradition contains doctrines not contained in Scripture. Baum, however, points to the 'Relations' of the Council as a source of light for future development in this area. Here it is explained that the Constitution "presents tradition neither as a quantitative supplement to Sacred Scripture, nor Sacred Scripture as a total codification of revelation."[63] Although the official document leaves the Catholic teaching unresolved, the most reliable 'interpretation' of the document shows clearly the direction toward which the conciliar teaching leans. Baum sums up the exact official position:

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[62] Baum, *art. cit.*, p. 65, the text itself saying (cited from appendix in Moran, *op. cit.* p. 205): " . . . Now what was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes towards the holiness of life and increase in faith of the people of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes." (n. 8).

> . . . while chapter 2 clearly teaches the uniqueness and the once-for-all character of the apostolic witness (depositum fidei), as it finds expression in Scripture as well as in preaching and celebration, this normative apostolic witness is not sufficiently distinguished from the witness of the post-apostolic Church. The text always hesitates to make a contrast between the apostolic Church and the post-apostolic Church. The text certainly indicates that the successors of the apostles were not witnesses to revelation as were

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[63] Ibid., p. 68.

> the apostles, but only transmitted, protected, and clarified what they themselves had received from the apostles. At the same time the text also intends to express that the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church is continuous and that, therefore, *a neat distinction between* the *apostolic* and *post-apostolic Church is hardly allowable*.[64]

Since there has never been any historical evidence for an apostolic doctrine from a non-Scriptural source, nor does there seem to be any hope that there ever will be any, the *practical solution* to the 'tradition problem' is just as certainly 'closed' as the *theoretical question* is still 'open.' No one, for example, has ever argued that the doctrine of the Assumption has its ultimate doctrinal 'ground' in such an *apostolic-non-scriptural* tradition. At most the possibility was appealed to. In the light of this conclusion on the pragmatic level, Moran's comment on the *theoretic* problem makes sense: "Given the present [broad] understanding of holy Scripture and revelation, the assertion that Scripture contains only part of revelation must be judged not incorrect but *unintelligible*."[65] As for the *pragmatic* solution Moran answers as we did. "The Church reflects upon her own life . . . ," he says, "as verbally mediated to her . . . *by Scripture*. The Scripture as the verbal precipitate of her tradition is *always at the base of her meditation* and

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[64] *Ibid*., p. 66.

[65] Moran, *op. cit*., pp. 109-110 (brackets ours).

and self understanding."[66] Thus Moran concludes to a linear transmission of the gospel through the single channel of Scripture.

2. Scripture

Now that the tradition problem has been given its practical answer, the real problem emerges, the problem of Scriptural interpretation and of doctrinal development. "The purpose of the apostolic writings," writes Moran, "is to lead us beyond apostle and writing to the mind of Christ."[67] Explaining this 'leading beyond process' he says that the words of Scripture are intrinsic to the revelational process. As its objective expression they exercise an inner guidance in the post-apostolic church and invite the believer to enter with the apostles into the mind of Christ. The Scriptures are to be read in faith unto a deeper understanding of it. "Only to the mind living in the conditions of the covenant," says Moran, "does Scripture surrender its meaning. The reader of Scripture as well as the writer receives the word in faith with the guidance of the Spirit and the direction of the Church's understanding."[68] This process of 'understanding the Scriptures' is fundamental to the whole process of doctrinal expression. We can readily see from this 'basic interpretational step' that the process of understanding and of development is itself part of the revelational process. The role of the whole Church is key; for, continuing revelation means Christ still revealing and still receiving the revelation--only now in his Body, the Church.

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[66] Ibid., p. 109.

[67] Ibid., p. 112.

[68] Ibid.

3. The Magisterium

Since any attempt to develop the message of Scripture by adding 'new revealed truths' is rejected by Christian belief, the 'power to discern' the true interpretation of the given Gospel is most important. This brings us to the discussion of authority--and since we will spend the next two sections looking at current Catholic thought on the authority of the *magisterium*, for the present we simply state *Verbum Dei's* one contribution to the topic. In it, however, is one of the key principles to the whole issue, namely, the complete sovereignty of the Word of God. The chapter on the *magisterium* begins traditionally and "repeats the Catholic doctrine that the Church, equipped with the Scriptures and guided by the Spirit . . . is ultimately able to transmit the deposit of faith authentically and without error (infallibly) through the authoritative doctrinal decisions of bishops and the pope."[69]

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[69] Baum, *art. cit.*, p. 60.

But there follows a clear break-through for Catholic documentation. The traditional doctrine which saw the apostolic witness as the 'remote norm' and the contemporary magisterium as the 'proximate norm' of belief and which had been repeated in the rejected 'first draft' was replaced. The adopted Constitution asserted that the magisterium is "not above the word of God but ministers to it."[70] The chapter also abandoned the advice of the first draft that the highest task of theology is to show that the teachings of Scripture are in harmony with the contemporary magisterium. "The teaching Church is, therefore," concludes Baum, "first the listening Church. . . . In their teaching office, bishops and pope remain listeners to the Word of God."[71] The 'Barthian principle' is now shared by Vatican II. This will serve as a good introduction to our Catholic reflections on infallibility.

The Church's Role in the Living Revelation

1. The Church

The second field of remarkable advance noted by Dulles in Vatican II documents was that of ecumenism. For our present purpose we narrow the topic to the core of ecumenism, the Church. The breadth of the 1967 Confessions's implicit ecclesiology (the Confession was by intention written for all Christians), if not equalled, was at least emulated by Vatican II's Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) and its

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., pp. 69-70.

Decree on Ecumenism. No longer was the one true Church of Christ simply identified with the visible Roman Catholic Church. To show this development it takes two steps: (1) The Constitution declared that the true Church subsists in the Roman Catholic Church (n. 8), whereas the first draft had stated that 'the Roman Catholic church alone is rightfully (jure) called the Church' and a second draft had still insisted 'this true Church of Christ is the Catholic Church;' (2) the Decree on Ecumenism speaks of 'other Churches and Church communities.' Combining the two enables us to say that the one Church of Christ also subsists to a greater or lesser degree in the other Churches. Even though there is not perfect communion, a real unity is affirmed.

We have seen that one asset of the biblical-personalist approach to revelation was that it accentuated a gospel-core or a 'hierarchy of truths.' The Decree on Ecumenism employed this 'hierarchy principle' in assessing the ecclesial elements that already united Roman and Protestant churches. These elements include: our common past history, our common faith in the central gospel affirmation as the norm for Christian living, our common baptism incorporating us into a real communion with Christ and one another, our common celebration of the Lord's Supper. "All Christians today," concludes a Catholic visitor to the Faith and Order Commission, "are becoming increasingly aware that our Christian faith is primarily our response, effected through God's grace, to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ."[72] The common elements, he adds, justify the statement that "what we have in common is greater than what divides us."[73] In virtue of this common commitment to Christ and his Church one very practical conclusion is that the Roman Catholic Church cannot impose papal primacy or infallibility as a condition of Christianity. In their Declaration on Religious Freedom the Council Fathers remind us that "the truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power" (par. 1)."[74] Roman Catholics are convinced that the Petrine function is included in Christ's will for the Church. But this very conviction imposes on them the obligation and responsibility of making this claim credible to others in the light of the New Testament witness.

The apologetical task of quietly establishing credibility has already begun. The statement on collegiality, the description of authority as service, and the repentant confession of past sinfulness on the part of the Roman Catholic church are significant examples. The Decree on Ecumenism repeatedly emphasized that the unity Christ wills must be a diversity in unity [par. 4]. It firmly declared that 'freedom is a prerequisite for any restoration of union' [par. 16]. The Constitution on the Church formally recognized the favorite Protestant emphasis on the 'pilgrim character' of the Church, and the Decree on Ecumenism elaborated the practical consequences involved: "Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth." [par. 6] This renewal and reformation must penetrate every aspect of the Church's life. The only exception made by the Decree was 'the deposit of faith itself,' which is however always subject at least to reformulation. All these elements

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[72] Camillus Hay, O.F.M., "The Ecclesiological Significance of the Decree on Ecumenism," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 3 (1966), p. 348.

[73] Ibid.

[74] See ibid., p. 350.

> . . . justify full Roman Catholic participation in the one quest for Christian unity; and indicate that there is no sphere of Christian thought which is closed to ecumenical dialogue. The christological elements present . . . "fidelity to Christ's will for the Church" as the norm for our Christian renewal. The pneumatological elements emphasize the need for respecting the diversity of the Spirit's gifts to the Church and the danger of confusing true unity with uniformity; . . . that the unity which Christ wills must be a "diversity in unity."[75]

This guarantee of absolute respect for the freedom of the Spirit and for the freedom of the individual is one of infallibility's best apologetics.

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[75] Ibid., p. 353.

2. The Church and Living Revelation

The last of Vatican II's Constitutions, *On the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*) deserves the final word. It is closest in tone to the 1967 Confession. Like the Confession *Gaudium et Spes* it emphasizes Paul's broad sense of revelation as 'reconciliation of the whole world,' declaring that 'all believers of whatever religion have always heard God's revealing voice in the discourse of creatures [art. 36, par. 5].' These secular and cosmic aspects of revelation are conjoined with its historical and anthropological aspects. The Constitution frequently refers to Christ as the light in whom history may be interpreted in its full breadth and man's soul in its inmost depths [art. 10]. "By its positive attitude toward the variety of human cultures," Dulles comments, ". . . *Gaudium et spes* counterbalances the primarily biblical orientation of *Dei Verbum*. It provides important clues for the unending process of distinguishing between the *permanently* valid content of Christian revelation and the time-conditioned formulations in which it necessarily comes to us . . ."[76] What was initially revealed in Christ *comes to fulfillment* in history through contact with the various forms of culture. This brings Vatican II full circle to a new integrating theology of revelation--as was true for the 1967 Confession.

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[76] Dulles, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

Conclusion

For Vatican II, as it was for the 1967 Confession, Christocentricity as opposed to propositional-centricity has been restored. Given the neo-orthodox influence on each, this is not surprising. A new theology of revelation has come to life in the Christian Church. The Word of God in Christ reveals himself to the Community of the Spirit who reflect-on and interpret the inscripturated gospel as it applies to the diverse cultures of man. The Word both reconciles the hearer and, in the reconciling, calls him to share in the ministry of its message. In this way the Word continues to be conceived by the Spirit in the hearts and minds of men in the living revelational process. This is the living revelational process constantly taking place within the universal Church. In the light of this unity we are now ready to discuss our diversity in the infallibility problem.

INFALLIBILITY AND FALLIBILITY

Introduction

The problem of true doctrinal development has two sides: the personal or subjective side with it 'infallibility' problem and the doctrinal-meaning or 'objective' side with its 'irreformability' problem. The two are inseparable and often spoken of interchangeably. Distinguishing them however may lessen the confusion. We begin with the better known, the infallibility problem.

True development does not just happen. It must be received in faith and discerned therein by human, fallible, sinful people--with the help of the Spirit. This 'discernment' is itself part of the revelation-faith process. If man-the-believer is going to achieve true development he must struggle and search through prayerful-doubt. Above all he must await the moment of the Spirit. This waiting-searching-discerning involves three subjective elements and instruments of the Spirit: (1) the individual believer, (2) the 'community of the Spirit,' and (3) the teachers of this community. The three together must wait for and discern the Spirit's moment of 'in-spiration.' In this moment they share in his 'power,' in his infallible-authoritative Word. The church's infallibility is then a limited and participated infallibility, but it is an essential characteristic of her faith.

The Three Elements or 'Subjects' of Discernment

1. The Individual Believer

Concerning the personal side of faith two principles must always be respected: man's right to his searching-doubt (his freedom even within faith) and the Spirit's sovereign freedom to give the doubt-dispelling gift at his own moment. Fr. Dulles rightly stresses the positive side of man's freedom-to-doubt as freedom-to-search-for-faith. The early Christians could not have understood our dogmas and were nonetheless orthodox in their faith. Why, he asked, couldn't the same freedom be granted today. He answered that creeds should result from the inner forces of 'lived faith' and hence "should not be forcibly imposed, by external authoritative action, upon peoples not prepared for them by their corporate historical experience."[77] Man should never become 'excessively responsible' for his fellow man's faith in the sense that the silent partner of his search-amid-doubt is the Spirit of Truth and Love. He acts where and when he will--but is always present as the One Sent to be with us.

Before he formally theologized about 'doubt and the Spirit' Fr. Dulles had experienced it. His description of his own 'prayerful doubt' as college student at Harvard contains the two freedoms:

> At night I would walk over to St. Paul's . . . and, standing beneath the stone crucifix . . . implore the dying Christ to draw me closer to Himself.
>
> Though He owed me nothing, God did not refuse my petition. "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him?" [Lk. 11:13] To find the truth about God,

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[77] Dulles, art. cit., p. 413.

> it may be helpful to read and to ponder, but it is indispensable to pray. For faith is a blessing which it is not in our power to lay hold of, nor in the power of any man to bestow, but a free gift which must be asked of God.[78]

Thirty years later, as theologian, he wrote again about the 'faith amid doubt' paradox. He pointed out that even the first Christians didn't actually 'see' that Jesus was Messiah or Lord, but found only 'signs within their own lives,' that their certitude was a matter of placing trust and confidence in Jesus. From these biblical examples he concluded that the certitude of faith "is entirely different in kind from the certitude of vision . . . These exclude doubt. But faith is open to doubt, perhaps inseparable from it. Any believer knows that at any moment he could without absurdity stop believing . . ."[79] The man of faith is therefore also a man of doubt. He deepens, develops, and purifies his faith under the constant criticism of his doubt.

2. The Communal Element

The 'community' must accompany the individual on the path of prayerful-doubt and search-for-faith. Their faith and doubt are reciprocally interrelated. They 'witness' to one another and in their witnessing often become the instruments of the Spirit for one another. The individual confesses his faith within the community and the community gradually builds a 'consensus confession.' The Spirit responds to the prayerful struggle of the community for this communal-faith--especially in their liturgical worship. This brings us to the Spirit's third potential instrument in building the communal-confession, the official teacher-preacher.

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[78] Avery R. Dulles, "Coming Home," Where I Found Chist, ed. John A. O'Brien (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1950), p. 77.

[79] A. R. Dulles, "Doubt in the Modern Church," A Lecture at the University of Iowa, May 9, 1968, n.p., n.d. (as printed in the Delmarva Dialog May 31, 1968, p. 4).

3. The Teacher

It is the 'ordained' task of the teacher-preacher to gather the larger Christian community's confession of faith and present it to his own community. At times this will demand formal concert with his fellow teachers. Then according to his own 'inspiration' he must offer or propose 'his interpretation' to the people. He must not impose it or he will be unable to 'test the message according to the Spirit.' The test will be proximately found in the response of the individual believers to the presence of the Spirit in the teacher's message, or in their inability to respond in his absence. The response itself must be carefully discerned. It requires that teachers (preachers) listen and open themselves to the community's response, and that they meet again with their fellow teachers to share their responses and discernments. Such was the method of the early church. Such is the present method of all the churches (individually and collectively). The Spirit has been sent to the community. It is here that he will speak. His special instrument of service within the community will be the teacher-preacher--who must be ever mindful of his role, instrument and servant.

It has become the consensus of Christian churches that these three instruments of the Spirit--individual, community, and teacher--share by their reciprocal relationships in the revelational-traditioning process. It seems that all Christians also hold for some type of participated-infallibility, at least in its broad sense, guaranteeing that revelation has and will be communicated in the moment of faith under the guidance of the Spirit. But concerning the manner in which the community and the teaching body share in the infallibility, the present state is one of 'search' rather than 'consensus.' This is especially so with regard to any 'declaratory-defining' phase as the culmination of the community search. Such a 'power' to offer a communal confession of faith to all believers as an expression of the 'divinely intended meaning of revelation' has become the focal point of the inter-Christian search. In this search individual churches have the same function relative to other churches as individuals have to their community. Their confession of faith has an apologetic witness value--above all in dispelling mis-understandings. With this in mind we continue our own apologetic for infallibility.

Limitations of Infallibility

1. Limitations of the Church's Infallibility

Speaking of the infallibility of the whole church Dulles condemns any notion of infallibility that borders on the mechanical ('infallibility-machine') approach. Such would grossly disrespect the needed reciprocity between the three elements just mentioned. In so doing they would jeopardize the reality of faith as a 'free response' to the 'divine invitation.' Dulles attributes the 'infallibility machine' instinct to many Christians (especially Roman Catholics) who almost by instinct look to the Church for the security their own lives lack and who cannot live with the idea of a church which is not always protected against error. He points out that in all the thousands of pages of encyclicals (and the eight-hundred pages of Vatican II) there is not a single sentence of teaching that has been 'declared' infallible. "But if a given doctrine is not infallible," he notes, "it is fallible; . . . it could be wrong. Having once conceded [this] . . ., Church authorities should not be afraid to admit, when the occasion requires, that they have been wrong."[80] Most of the faithful are unaware of just how fallible most of the Church's guidance really is.

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[80] Ibid.

But for all her difficulty in discerning exactly when she is infallible the Church, Dulles insists, does have 'a certain measure of infallibility.' His argumentation seems to make it a matter of implicit revelation. "Christ promised," he reasons, "that the Church would last till the end of time . . . If the Church lost sight of the essential content of God's revelation . . ., the world would be in effect deprived of the benefit's of Christ's coming."[81] He concludes that at decisive turning points the Church has spoken with 'complete unanimity and unclouded assurance.' Finally he brings up a real difficulty concerning the present listing, or lack of it, of certainly infallible teachings. "We have to rely on the agreement of theologians in this matter," Dulles says, "and they sometimes disagree. In some periods of history the zone of infallibility is understood very widely; at other times it is contracted. . . ."[82] If this difficulty argues implicitly for the need of an ultimate 'discerning power' it equally points to the limitations of such a power and to the need for the other reciprocal criteria of the faith-revelation process.

2. Limitations of Papal Infallibility

Hans Küng has recently discussed the problem of the teaching-body's infallibility. Following the pattern of Dulles on church-infallibility he first describes the limitations of such a power. "As over against the revelation of God," he says, "the Church and the teaching office stand in a relationship of obedience, in a concrete juxtaposition to the exalted Lord . . . who prayerfully speaks to the Church through His Gospel."[83] He adds that this obedient servitude of the Church to the Word of God never reverses itself (as we saw officially proclaimed by Vatican II). "The Church," Küng asserts, "never 'possesses' the word of God as her property. Rather, the Church remains under the word of God, precisely thereby remaining the possession and the property of the Lord . . ."[84] This limitation applies to the power of 'papal definition' in a double sense, for the Pope is servant of the Servant (Church) of the Word.

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid. In the autobiography of his conversion (art. cit., 75) Dulles uses a similar apologetic upon himself: "It would violate the logic of the Incarnation for Christ to have left . . . a Church to keep His doctrine incorrupt . . . To the Apostles [and their successors] He had given a share in His own infallibility, so that to despise their words was to despise the words of Christ."

Küng carefully distinguishes papal-pronouncement from revelation, emphasizing that it is only a witness 'to the revelation that has occurred.' He specifies four limitations:

> Unlike God's revelation the charism of infallibility bestowed on the successors of Peter by the Spirit signifies (a) not a new authoritative divine word, but only an explanation and a defense of the revelation that has already occurred; (b) the main cause always remains the human subject (the pope); (c) for it, the assistance of the Holy Spirit

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[83] Hans Küng, Structures of the Church, tr. by Salvator Attanasio (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons), p. 362.

[84] Ibid.

> does not have the character of a special inner revelation, but only that of an external preservation from error; (d) hence it is not a divine word but only a human utterance about the word of God.[85]

We would differ with Küng on his third limitation. We grant that infallibility is not a special inner revelation in the sense of something not already revealed, but neither is it merely an 'external preservation from error.' In essence it is the 'light of faith' given to the teacher-preacher, and this is an internal charism. (More will be said about this later.) The positive side of Küng's presentation should be stressed, namely, that the papal declaration is 'an authoritative witness.' For the individual believer it can be the 'determinative witness' used by the Spirit in concert with the other witnesses.

Concerning the 'other witnesses' Küng next points out the reciprocal dependence they have with the papal witness and, of course, vice-versa. The Church depends on the papal definition as a final and authoritative witness to revelation. But the Pope is first and above all a believer and as any other believer he depends on the communal-faith of the Church as contained in its 'tradition'--past (above all the Scriptures) and present. Küng insists that we cannot separate the pontiff from his 'well-ordered connection with the Church.' The Pope depends on the faith of the whole Church. He explains:

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[85] Ibid., p. 361.

> Since the truth to be defined is neither revealed nor imparted as inspiration to the pope, the pope is duty-bound to apply means that are in keeping with the gravity of the matter at hand (councils, advice of the bishops, cardinals, theologians, and similar persons) in order to correctly inquire into the truth and to make an appropriate announcement. No doubt there exists *no absolute necessity* for the *pope to consult* with the Church of the episcopate *in a definite way*; but there is certainly a relative necessity.[86]

In this light the words of Vatican I--"but *not by consensus* of the Church"--are to be taken in their anti-Gallican context. "The necessity of a simultaneous or subsequent consensus of the episcopate is to be excluded," Küng says, "yet it is not to be maintained that the pope can define a truth without, *as a basis*, the prior existence of a consensus of the Church . . ."[87] He distinguishes *the ground of law* from which the binding force derives from the criterion on the the basis of which the pope produces the decision. An interesting question arises concerning the limitations of papal infallibility. Can the pope 'sin' against his infallibility (e.g., by deliberate simulation)? The question involves the relationship of infallibility and impeccability. Tradition says they are not the same. Vatican I said nothing. If the pope can 'sin by heresy' even in the exercise of his defining power, the second question arises: is there any check and balance system in the church teaching office which would guarantee the ultimate indefectibility and infallibility of the church? The problem was recently stated in a generic way by Michael Novak. The papacy he claimed was in need of demythologization. "Are there ways," he asked, "in which the church might be protected against the weaknesses to which Peter is, as a man, often prone?"[88] Rahner comes closest to answering the specific question asked. He allows for the case of a heretical Pope but doesn't apply the 'sin' to his very office of infallibility. He says that Catholic ecclesiology allows for the possibility of a pope losing his office and

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[86] *Ibid*., pp. 369-70, citing *Mansi* 52, 1213 (twice).

[87] *Ibid*., p. 371, referring to R. Aubert, "L'ecclesiologie au concile du Vatican," in: *Le concile el les conciles* (Paris, 1960), pp. 271, 281 and G. Thils, "Parlera-t-on des eveques au concile?" *Nouvelle revue theologique*, 93 (1961), p. 791. In "Episcopal Collegiality According to Lumen Gentium", *Lumen Vitae*, 20 (1965), Georges Dejaifve shows that the Constitution left the question 'whether the episcopal college constituted a second subject of power' unanswered and 'still open.' But, his own opinion seems to bind the two together reciprocally and indivisibly (p. 648): "The Constitution repeats more than once that there is no college without the Pope; nowhere does it say there is no Pope without the College. If there is a relationship between the Head and the Body, surely it is mutual. . . Can we neglect to consider the consequences, if the episcopal college is to find its proper place in the divine structure of the Church?" Karl Rahner in his *Bishops: Their Status and Function* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964) in arguing for an

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episcopal advisory board balances both sides of the issue (p. 67f): " . . . it cannot restrict the supreme authority of the pope, since this is not dependent on its cooperation . . ." But he immediately qualifies (ibid.): "[this] does not exclude but includes the fact that the pope thereby acts . . . as head of the episcopal college; that he is bound by Scripture and the faith of the Church, which has its authentic teaching office in the whole episcopate [italics ours] . . ."

[88] Michael Novak, "Authority in Ecumenical Perspective," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 3 (1966), p. 367.

membership in the Church. "The election of a new pope is possible," he adds, "because the Church, even on the death (physical or moral) of the pope, remains historically constituted and the office also remains historically present."[89] The case is abstruse but it points out two things: the limitations of the pope and the ultimate necessity for respecting the freedom of the individual under the Spirit. For ourselves we hypothesize that if ever the pope 'sinfully deceived' the church in a matter of 'faith,' the Spirit would not 'inspire' the faithful to respond. He would eventually inspire the church to act against the sin. The act of definition would not have been a true exercise of infallibility.

In conclusion it can be said that there are definite limitations to papal infallibility and definite 'conditions' to be fulfilled for the valid exercise of this function. Above all the 'reciprocalities of dependence' must be respected: "the infallibility of the pope is not self-contained but must serve the freedom from error of the Church."[90] What the Church has in a permanent way (infallibilitas in credendo), and the collegium of bishops has in an ordinary way (_infallibilitas in docendo_), the ecumenical councils and pope have in an extraordinary way (_infallibilitas in definiendo_).[91]

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[89] Karl Rahner, Bishops: Their Status and Function, Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964, 55. Rahner also speaks of sinning within the office of definition ["What is a Dogmatic Statement," Theological Investigations, Vol. 5 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), p. 46: ". . . it becomes clear that even within the truth of the church and of dogmatically correct statements it is absolutely possible to speak sinfully . . ."

[90] Küng, op. cit., p. 376.

Infallibility and Freedom

The individual's freedom cannot be called a direct limitation of infallibility, but it can be looked upon as an indirect and extrinsic limitation. Since infallibility involves faith and since faith calls for the _free response_ of the individual, the infallible witness to faith must respect and await the free response--especially if this witness belongs to a human teaching authority. It must not impose itself. The pressure must be brought to bear _from within_ the potential recipient of faith--and this by the power of the Spirit. Fr. Dulles emphasizes this respect for freedom even in the face of 'infallible papal definitions.' Thus the words applied to the Church, that she can 'command obedience or assent' are ill-chosen when applied to faith. Actually what is meant (or should be) is that the church 'offers the communal confession' as her witness to revelation, in and through which witness the Holy Spirit may at his own given moment invite the individual to encounter the Word of God. To believe because of the witness alone is not to believe in Christ but in man.

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[91] G. Thils, _art. cit_. (_supra_ n. 87), p. 797.

To clarify the principle Dulles chooses the example of the Trinity. To the question: is there room for doubt even here?--he replies:

> Again, I should answer, yes. For as I said in the opening portion of this talk, faith by its very nature is subject to doubt; its certitude cannot be the tranquil and untroubled certitude of clear vision. Even while making the free commitment of faith, we may be troubled by anxiety . . . We can whole heartedly assent to something while at the same time we are inclined to disbelieve it. We are conscious of the risk of faith.[92]

It should be noted that Dulles is talking about the doubt due to freedom, not sinful refusal to search. A special cause of this doubt is the difficulty of understanding what one is asked to believe (not the understanding of its mystery, but the understanding of 'the bare statement of that which is mystery'). Dulles explains:

> . . . key terms such as Incarnation, Resurrection, Redemption, admit of a variety of meanings which makes it difficult for people to decide whether they accept these doctrines or not. Until they are clear in what they are being asked to believe, they may legitimately be in a state of indecision. After all, nobody can really assent to something he does not even understand, [i.e., the statement of what he is asked to believe].
>
> . . . Until this explanation is offered, belief must take the form of hope that one will eventually be able to believe what is really meant.[93]

All this emphasizes again the need for the church to respect the individual's freedom and to see her own role as 'service' to the individual. The responsibility for toleration falls to the Church. In the face of insolence she may and should 'shake the dust and leave the house,' but she should never attempt to impose her service.

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[92] Dulles, art. cit., p. 5.

[93] Ibid.

A Positive Apologetic for Infallibility

1. From the Community Aspect of Christianity

An apologetic makes reasonable and credible--nothing more. A reasonable explanation of the church's power to discern the revelation takes its lead, as promised, from McAfee Brown's suggestion. Christ, he said, gradually draws mankind into a community of faith and love. Having already stressed the fact that the 'drawing into' is by love and not by force, another element now deserves our analysis, the significance of the 'community.' Vatican I left a signpost to this aspect of infallibility when the council fathers described the personal infallibility of the pope by linking it to the communal infallibility of the church. Living communion is the core-meaning of the church. The communion is constituted by a share in the power of the living-risen Lord. Concretely this means sharing his knowledge and love--and his infallibility.

Gabriel Moran develops the significance of the 'community aspect' of the revelational process. He begins with the formation of the Bible itself as the 'communal expression of the faith of the early Church.' "The Bible," he says, "is not only the objectification of the apostle's (or prophet's) teaching. It is something that emerged out of the life and work of the community."[94] Especially in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament, there was "an interplay of individual and communal experience, a reciprocal relationship between lived knowledge and written expression."[95] The writings not only originated from the communal-life of the Church (especially her liturgical life), but one of their purposes was to witness to the inner mystery of the communal-life itself.[96] But this 'community aspect' of the revelation-process was not to end with the formation of the Bible. The Church and revelation were to continue their unique relationship. The Church was, like Christ, both the recipient and the instrumental traditor of revelation. "The Church," says Moran, ". . . bears the revelation and is borne by the revelation."[97] It was moreover the Church precisely as a community that was to share in this receiving-traditioning role.[98] But people living in community mean people listening and speaking to one another, sharing ideas and goals, and organizing themselves in pursuit of these goals. "If the Church is to be truly human," notes Moran, "the divine guidance must find human expression in an authority structure."[99] Such a structure would not oppose the Spirit or the Scriptures, but would be "the extension of these set up for the service of the whole church."[100] In fact one of the primary tasks of the authority structure would be to determine how the Scriptures "can effectively be upheld in practice."[101] Nor was the role of this authority to decide alone the truth or falsity of what Scripture said, but rather to determine the truth or falsity of individual interpretations.[102] "Far from eliminating all 'private interpretation,'" notes Moran, "the existence of a magisterium ought to be the guarantee that every sector . . . and every individual within the Church can contribute an understanding of revelation."[103] In sum, if Christianity is essentially a community life, it must first be a good human community.

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[94] Moran, op. cit., p. 99.

[95] Ibid., p. 101.

[96] See ibid., citing K. Rahner, Inspiration in the Bible, p. 49.

[97] Ibid., p. 139.

[98] See ibid., p. 140.

2. Lessons from a Religious Community

A 'religious community' is supposed to be the model for the 'church community.' Some current problems and suggested solutions for religious-life might be instructive for our problem of infallibility and magisterial authority. Moran co-authored an article with Sister Maria Harris wherein religious life was seen to be "caught somewhere between the place where God murmurs in the heart and the place where he thunders from the mountain."[104] Two areas were suggested for examination: (1) the nature of authority in Christianity and (2) the nature of small group interaction as the basis of divine revelation. We start with the second area first.

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid., citing L. Bouyer, Word, Church and Sacrament, p. 28.

[102] See ibid.

[103] Ibid., pp. 140-41.

The article states that many religious cannot "fathom what the words 'divine revelation' mean because they have never experienced any human revelation."[105] The conditions for human revelation are: time, trust, love, shared interests and experience. "Religious life," the authors report, "ought to be the place where the loving knowledge of revelation would most certainly be found. The tragic fact is that many people in religious life are lonely."[106] Many applications to the larger Catholic community are currently being brought to light. One of the most often discussed is the authority problem. Rather than develop people who practice childish decision-less obedience the ideal and goal of the religious community is to produce men and women of decision. Again the applications to the church at large are obvious:

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[104] Gabriel Moran and Sister Maria Harris, "Revelation and Religious," The National Catholic Reporter, Nov. 22, 1967, p. 6.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

> When we conceive a revelation as a God now revealing, then the one source of authority becomes the Holy Spirit. As Jesus has received all power from his Father, so all Christians insofar as they live in the Spirit participate in his power. It simply is not true that in Christianity some people have the power to issue commands and other people are called simply to obey commands. All Christians are in essentially the same position of receiving power from God and directing obedience to God. To obey . . . is to listen and respond; to govern . . . is to listen and respond, but from the perspective of making a decision for the whole community.[107]

3. Infallibility and Consensus

Since the Spirit's gift of 'infallibility' is itself a part of the faith-gift and so an object of faith, it can be believed-in but never directly known. Each must discern the "signs" for himself in the witnesses that are present. The greatest sign for the Church's infallibility is the 'growing consensus' of faith itself. This demands individual listening, exchange, and prayer. To believe that this growing communal-faith is not just happening but that it is the Spirit's gift is to believe in the Church's infallibility (or whatever one wants to call it). To believe that the church teachers have a special share in 'discerning the growing consensus' is to believe that they share in the church's infallibility--for they need the whole church in order to exercise their own proper functions. A reciprocal process is involved: the teacher's listen prayerfully to the faith of their flock and then lead the faithful in a public confession of what they discern. This they do by *offering* their own confession as witness to the free response of the people. The faithful respond and discern according to the Spirit's unique personal inspiration. Papal infallibility is a special part of the 'teaching-infallibility.' Either in concert with the 'teacher's-college' or alone as its head the Spirit may move the pope 'in faith' to declare and confirm the church's infallible faith and *invite* all in the church to *confess together* this faith.

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[107] *Ibid.*

Total consensus is not necessary for the teachers' decisions. The Spirit uses the *sensus fidei* (the *growing* consensus) as a sign sufficient for their faith to judge the 'communal-faith' and the timeliness for a public confession of it. The responsibility for decision is shared by the whole Church--by each member in his own way. As far as the whole church is concerned the decision begins before and continues even after a papal definition until the final *consensus* is had in the *parousia.* A problem can often be that individuals (including teachers) are not *Spirit*-ual enough to respond and discern. They must pray and the church must pray for them. A good summary comes from Moran's article on the religious community:

> The word dialogue [speak and listen!], therefore points not to a fad or a technique but to the nature of a religious community. The main interlocutors . . . are the Holy Spirit and the community. Within the community each member has not only the right but the duty to speak out for the perfecting of the whole body. For the achievement of this in fact, there must be built into the religious order subsidiary structures that will make listening and speaking a practical reality.[108]

The whole community must dialogue, but the dialogue is itself a means to deeper confession of faith. Its meaningfulness comes from its goal. As one of the most important 'means' and 'witnesses' to faith the dialogue-process may itself be drawn up into the moment of faith by the action of the Spirit.

4. Infallibility as Service

Teaching in the Church should be seen as a service to the thinking and listening people. It is a service to help them make free decisions in their responsible search for God's Word. The attitude of service brings with it respect for the ones served and for the decisions they must make. The teacher (especially the pope and bishops in the Catholic eyes) is chosen by the Church to perform this service, to discern the church's faith under the guidance of the Spirit. He must make his decision about the church's faith according to the light of the Spirit. His public confession and proclamation under the Spirit is offered as his humble service and hopefully as the Spirit's witness-instrument to the faithful who are under the same Spirit. They in their turn should respect the teacher, listen to his message, and prayerfully await the moment of the Spirit's gift. The moment is not for them to decide.

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[108] Ibid.

Conclusion

We close our reflection on infallibility by placing it in the context of the concrete act of faith. As a charism of the Spirit in his communication of God's revelation to man (effecting both teacher and believer) it is a part of faith itself. By the very fact that it is God in His Word who 'meets us in communication,' the communication itself must be infallible, for God is all Truth.

'Faith knoweldge' is paradoxically the richest and the poorest. Its richness lies in the divine encounter; its poorness in that the obscurity of the same encounter asks our homage and humility. The light of faith with its 'infallibility' does shine on the believer, on the communal church, and on her teachers, but only enough to be a means for them 'to meet God in loving-trust.' If faith's certitude is found in the light and love within man's heart and mind, the same is true about its 'infallibility.' In fact there seems to be no difference between the 'charism of infallibility' and the 'gift of certain faith.' Within the concrete act of faith the believer 'sees in faith' his own certain act as a part of the 'community faith' wherein Christ the Word is still infallibly receiving and transmitting the Father's revelation little by little to His whole Body. Fr. Dulles' description of his personal discovery bears out the theological description:

> Looking upon Christ as the source of true life, I desired with all my heart to approach Him more closely. He must, I knew, have established some bridge by which we could come to Him across the gap of two millennia. . . . It would argue a contradiction in God if He had revealed the truth through Christ and then suffered that Revelation to be mutilated. . . . [So] Christ . . . instituted a Church to keep His doctrine incorrupt and to carry on His work of sanctifying souls. . . . He had endowed them with power to baptize, to forgive sins, and to celebrate the mysteries of His Body and Blood. Thus He enabled us not only to approach Him with our minds but to unite our very being to His. . . . To reason, this might seem a "hard saying," but love, believing all things, was impatient to receive Christ's Sacrament of Love.[109]

In the concrete act of faith all Christians share in Christ's infallibility and profess their belief therein.

IRREFORMABILITY AND REFORMABILITY

Introduction

Corresponding to infallibility which looks to the personal or subjective side of the revelation-faith process, we have irreformability which looks to its 'objective-truth' or 'doctrinal-meaning' side. The question now asked is: in revelation can there be 'divinely intended meaning' which

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[109] Dulles, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 91), p. 75.

as received-in-faith is irreformable? Obviously 'irreformability' stands or falls with the 'infallibility' of the people of God, for if we are capable of receiving God's truth infallibly, then we know that it is as changeless as he is. It is also obvious that just as the Church was seen to be more fallible than infallible, so her doctrine will be more reformable than irreformable.

The first part of this section will stress irreformability. Then we shall consider the reformability of doctrine. With regard to irreformability our thesis is: *inasmuch as* the individual believer, the Church, and her teachers are *infallible* in their faith (both in its receiving and in its communication), *to the same extent* is 'the divinely intended meaning' or 'the faith-truth communicated' *irreformable*. Like infallibility, irreformability must be grounded in the context of revelation and faith.

Irreformability

In the revelation-faith process there are two elements involved: the 'divine inspiration' and the 'human understanding.' In faith the two are inseparable, but they must be distinguished. Man searches for faith (*intellectus quaerens fidem*) and once having it he struggles for its deeper understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). The human and the divine are conjoined in the one act, but to clarify the irreformability-reformability problem we take alternate approaches. First we take the seeking-faith side (*intellectus quaerens fidem*). Since faith concerns God's truth and God's truth is unchangeable, this first approach will take up the irreformability of doctrine problem. There will be two levels to our inquiry: (1) faith-irreformability in the individual believer and (2) faith-irreformability in the church as historical community.

1. Irreformability and the Faith of the Individual

The path of the individual believer in developing his faith is fundamentally to re-tread in his personal-history the whole church's path of development. His personal history then becomes part of the church's history. The journey begins with his first real act of faith, that is, his first real encounter with God revealing himself in Christ--and this usually through 'the gospel' as somehow proclaimed in the church. For every new generation of believers new formulations will be presented, but they must always somehow involve the 'primary faith.' This must be basically the same as that communicated to and by Christ, and as that reflected in the apostolic-witness. It is in this primitive and initial faith-encounter, personal for each believer, at once the richest and the poorest, that 'the divinely intended meaning' of 'the Christian revelation itself' begins to be perceived. It must maintain its primacy in all subsequent encounters. All the 'deeper understanding of generations' will be nothing if it fails to 'witness-to' the basic gospel or divinely-intended-meaning: Jesus Kyrios revealing the Father's redeeming Love for all of us. The richness of any deeper development lies in its own nought, save to serve as further witness to Christ, the Revelation Himself. Thus the 'faith-knowledge' of Christ is basic for every Christian believer and for all Christian doctrine.

The faith-process and its primitive conceptualization of this basic 'divinely intended meaning' is omni-cultural, adaptable to all cultures. In this sense the meaning is irreformable. At the same time it will grow as 'faith'grows, and it will activate all true development of understanding for the believer. In this sense it is also reformable. To whatever extent there is this true development-in-understanding of "the primitive revelational meaning" to that extent the new meaning participates in the irreformability. To whatever extent there is still any inadequacy in the understanding, there must be continued search for deeper meaning, and the faith of this individual is said to be 'reformable.' More will be said about reformability shortly.

2. Irreformability and the Communal Faith

The individual and personal approach to faith must always be primary. But there is also the non-personal aspect to the problem of irreformability, namely, the objective-doctrinal aspect, the historical-recording of the communal-faith of the Church, often called 'the church's faith' or 'doctrinal-tradition.' This too is important, because man's personal history and personal faith builds itself in relationship to the whole of history and to the history of doctrine (doctrinal tradition). This is true in a special way about Scripture, man's first recording of his Christian faith, for it must stand-under all subsequent understanding and development. This is why it has been given a unique normative role. But it is also true in the post-apostolic church.

To believe in the continued guidance of the Spirit by way of an infallible church (with an infallible teaching office) is to believe in a 'growing doctrinal interpretation' which has at least the potential of being confessed as continuing part of the 'divinely intended meaning,' and of being to that extent irreformable. Irreformability, as infallibility, is rooted basically in the Spirit's 'light of faith.' While infallibility looks to the subjective-charism, irreformability looks to the objective-meaning or truth-value in the same infallible communication. It says that this truth is meaning-wise unchangeable because it communicates (in a limited way) God's self-revelation which is unchangeable. As faith enables us to participate in God's infallible power to perceive and communicate, so in the same faith the truth-perceived participates in the irreformability of the divine Truth.

Reformability in General

In its negative sense 'reformability' focuses on sinfulness and error. This meaning played a large part in the Protestant Reform and still colors the meaning of reformability for many Protestant theologians (recall Barth and Dowey). The present analysis will limit itself to its positive meaning: the development of and deepening of man's understanding of his faith (the development of doctrine). Reformability of doctrine simply says that its irreformability is limited. Man's human understanding of the initial revelation has evolved or developed and must continue to develop. From the historical-temporal point of view we can distinguish 'later' from 'earlier' developments. We even have boundary markers to delimit the 'revelation as understood apostolically' as opposed to post-apostolic-development. In another sense all true development (doctrinal reform) is itself absorbed into the one confession of living faith.

Recent emphasis on the personal aspect of faith and its development has diminished the importance of the apostolic versus post-apostolic distinction. It likens the development of faith in each individual (apostolic or post-apostolic) to the development that took place in the human consciousness of Christ. In doing so it minimalizes the difference in the charisms given to the apostolic versus the post-apostolic church and puts new emphasis on the role of the living church. At the same time it in no way denies the necessity of historical continuity with the normative records of the apostles, nor does it threaten their normativeness.

Meaning and Formulation

From an ecumenical point of view one of the trouble spots in the reformability-irreformability area involves the distinction between 'formula' and 'meaning.' The real question comes down to this: if the formulation of a dogma--not just words, but also ideas, images, etc.--is always so changeable, can there ever be a 'dogma' which is irreformable? Recent Catholic theologians have shown a definite tendency away from the 'canonization' of formulas, but have been insistent that there can be 'irreformability' of doctrine with regard to its 'meaning.' We will study the opinions of two: (1) Avery Dulles and (2) Bernard Lonergan.

1. Avery Dulles

Fr. Dulles defines the problem of 'dogmatic formulation' as more than one of 'verbal analysis.' "Revelation always comes to men within some definite sociocultural situation," he says, "and this necessarily affects the manner in which they articulate the revelation conceptually."[110] The problem within the problem is whether we are able to isolate 'the revelation itself'--and so the 'irreformable meaning.' While rejecting any 'residue notion' of some 'supra-cultural' formulation, Dulles is insistent on the importance of being able to distinguish 'between the revelation itself' and its 'culturally conditioned expression' in a dogmatic formula. A competent interpreter of biblical and ecclesiastical proclamations will have to examine the whole historico-cultural context 'to discern its true significance.' Dulles opts for a process of 'logical-proportionality' as opposed to the residue (basic meaning) way. We will let him explain:

> *This process of reinterpretation cannot be a matter of stripping away the human conceptual vesture until one reaches some timeless and unquestionable kernel of pure divine truth. The pursuit of such an unconditioned grasp of revelation is an illusion, betraying a serious ignorance of man's fundamental historicity.* *We* ourselves *are* just as *historically conditioned* as our *ancestors, and* hence *cannot hope to achieve supra-cultural formulations.* The hermeneutic process by which we interpret past dogmatic formulations will involve a concrete logic of proportionality. We begin by noting that the revelation (R) was expressed in a certain way (a^1) by men in a

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[110] Dulles, *art. cit.*, p. 405 (italics ours).

> cultural situation (a^2). Our problem is to devise a new statement (b^1) approporiate to our own cultural situation (b^2).[111]

Basically we are discussing an epistemological question. While totally in agreement with Dulles on the need for cultural adaptation and in this sense the 'reformability' even of dogmatic formulas, we are not sure that his proportionality-method will enable him to distinguish between 'the revelation itself' and 'its culturally conditioned expression.' How can he distinguish these two unless he knows both terms? This seems to presuppose certain basic conceptualizations which are not culturally conditioned. The adaptation (re-interpretation) process would seem to demand a known 'basic meaning' that is being adapted. Lonergan sheds some light on this problem.

2. Bernard Lonergan

Lonergan makes the point that even under transcultural adaptations the basic correspondence between knowledge and being remains, and we take it that he means the 'knower' is aware of what this basic correspondence is. He uses the example of Trinitarian formulations:

> For Augustine, persona or substantia was an undefined, heuristic concept. He pointed out that Father, Son, and Spirit are three. He asked, three what? . . . He answered that there are three persons or substances, where "person" or "substance" just

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[111] *Ibid*., p. 406 (italics ours).

> means what there are three of in the Trinity. Obviously, such an account of the notion of "person" does no more than indicate, so to speak, the area to be investigated. It directs future development but it cannot be said to impede it. The only manner in which it could become outworn would be the rejection of the Trinity; for as long as the Trinity is acknowledged, there are acknowledged three of something.[112]

Lonergan does affirm the permanence of the original heuristic structure amid subsequent development, and we presuppose he brings with the structure the 'undefined, heuristic concept.' ". . . The original heuristic structure, while it has remained," Lonergan says, "has not remained indeterminate. It has been developed in different ways at different times . . ."[113] Whether or not the 'heuristic conceptualization' can be called a 'kernel' or 'residue' concept (in Dulles mind), we feel that it is vital to the development process.

There is common ground in the emphasis on the importance of the 'meaning' as opposed to its 'formulation' as well as on the fact that somehow the meaning (the revelation itself) can be distinguished from its cultural expression. Karl Rahner sums it up for all:

> It is not . . . necessary to dispute the fact that the Church can distinguish, within the mixed up mass of what is human and what is divine in

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[112] Bernard F. Lonergan, "The Dehelenization of Dogma," Theological Studies 28 (1967), p. 346 (italics ours).

[113] Ibid. (italics ours).

> Tradition . . . One will absolutely have to concede this instinct to her because of the assistance of the Holy Spirit promised to her. But this does not yet answer the question as to _how_ the church makes this necessary distinction . . . Let us suppose that the Church is able to do this by the light of faith granted to her . . . [But] there is a _norma normans_ . . . and this norm is identical with Scripture and it alone.[114]

This leaves us again with our reciprocal criteria: the Word and the Spirit in the Church.

Conclusions

Dulles echoes the sentiments of Dowey and Hendry on the reformab_ility_ (and _reformanda_) of 'dogmatic formulations' (what they often meant by 'propositional truths'). But the real problem of 'irreformability' and 'reformability' does not lie at the _formulation_-level but at the 'meaning level.' Hearing the distinction may help the dialogue get to the real point. The level of 'meaning' in our case refers to the 'divinely intended meaning.' It is the revelation-faith level.

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[114] K. Rahner, "What is a Dogmatic Statement," _Theological Investigations_, 5 (Baltimore, Helicon Press, 1966), p. 64. In another article "What is Heresy?" (_Theological Investigations_, 5, p. 507) Rahner clearly supports Dulles position: ". . . Yet this divine truth expressed in human words is not given to us that it may simply go on being repeated with everlasting monotony in the textbooks of dogmatic theology. No, it is meant to bring about a living encounter with man in the concrete, to enter into his heart and mind . . . and to bring man to truth. Man, just as he is formed by his age, his experiences, . . . his spiritual situation . . . must hear this divine message ever anew in the whole of his characteristic situation. . . and since the truth of revelation cannot and will not exist on earth in an external 'in itself' of eternal validities [in einem Ansich ewiger Geltungen], but only in its actually 'being believed'--the pure, eternally, unchanging truth of the

One last limitation should be mentioned. It limits both the irreformability and the reformability of doctrine. It is the sovereign freedom of the Revealer to not reveal Himself as much as we want Him to. God has chosen to reveal Himself in the obscurity and darkness of faith. We must remember that we will often feel this darkness in humility. "It may be," said Dowey, "that theology should hold back where the Bible itself holds back, and not fill up incomplete topics with systematic conclusions."[115]

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gospel must, for this reason, bear in every age the imprint of that age within the concrete realizations of its knowledge and acknowledgment." (Brackets are ours: a difficult translation. We suggest: 'as an objectivised deposit of eternal truths.')

[115] Dowey, A Commentary . . ., pp. 37-38.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude we shall draw up a list of summary statements, and then point out some areas for continued research.

THE STATEMENTS

On Revelation

Our first three statements concern revelation: (1) on the Bible and interpretation, (2) on faith in its primary-interpersonal form, and (3) on the truth-content of faith.

1. On Biblical Interpretation

There is a practical Christian consensus, by-passing the theoretical Scripture versus Tradition problem, that the normative witness to be meditated upon for all revelational understanding is the Bible with its gospel message. The 'divinely intended meaning' of revelation was first given to the human consciousness of Christ and developed therein until it was fully understood by him at the Resurrection meeting with His Father. This revelation was transmitted by Christ and His Spirit to the apostles, disciples, and evangelists in a partial way but with its full incarnational-reconciliational-trinitarian mystery. The traditioning of the revelation took place in the obscurity of a 'living-loving-faith' whose unique revelational-core, Jesus Christ, was to be progressively understood by each individual and by the historical-recordings of the whole community as the Christian consciousness of man developed. Faith was to interpret faith. Each successive interpretation required the 'inspiratio' (broad sense) of the Spirit in order to 'discern' the 'primary mystery of faith' together with the development added by the human power of 'insight' and 'inference.' Since the 'primary mystery level' which in the concrete will be the Church's progressive interpretation of Scripture, has not been fully interpreted yet; and since the faith of each individual more or less follows behind the developmental path traversed by the historical Church, the 'inspiratio' or 'light' of faith must always complement the inferential process of human reason. This holds for the individual believer as well as for the theologian studying the church's body of historical doctrine. The combination of 'faith-in-reason' or 'reason-with-faith' gives the illusion of illogical development. Scripture's 'primary mystery level' can only rarely and with great difficulty be clearly distinguished from the human inference and insight of the interpreter. Scholars still struggle to draw the line between 'legitimate interpretation' and 'valid inference'--as hermeneutic theories like the 'Sensus plenior' well illustrate. An easier example of the process would be the development of the Trinitarian mystery, a direct implication from the 'divinity of the Son' and 'the divinity of the Spirit.' At this point the process of consensus enters the picture, but with complications.

Thus in such controversial questions as the 'real Eucharistic presence' and our own question of 'ecclesial indefectibility and infallibility,' we should not be surprised at the confusion and delay in reaching a Christian consensus--sometimes concerning the difference between 'mystery' and 'inference,' at others the validity of the inference itself. We can only conclude that it is important to know the complexity involved in the doctrinal-development-process. We can understand the hesitancy of many Christians to attribute irreformability to any product of doctrinal development. All agree that the '*inspiratio* of the Spirit' and the 'light of faith' are called-for in any true development. But they have not agreed on the practical modalities or extent of the Spirit's guidance.

2. On Personal Faith

The difficulty involved in the hermeneutic problem was greatly relieved, and also partially bypassed, by the neo-orthodox rediscovery of 'primary faith'--the encounter-moment with 'God revealing Himself and His saving-love.' The emphasis on the interpersonal nature of revelation-faith, as involving not only the cognitive or intellectual-doctrinal aspect, but also involving the heart, love, and free-will of the responding believer, added balance to the faith-mystery. It made the Spirit's 'inspiratio' both 'light to mind' and 'uplifting attraction to heart.' The entire personal approach has received recent backing from the Post-Bultmannian Scripture school which points out that the very language of the Bible goes far beyond 'statement' (*Darstellung*), and also includes various forms of 'expression' (*Kundgabe*) and 'address' (*Auslösung*).[1] "Thus if God, in a personal exchange, wishes to reveal himself to us as a person, he must use the medium of knowledge in all its functions."[2]

3. On the Truth-Content of Faith

The third conclusion follows from the second. As opposed to some interpreters of the Brunner-Barth school, we opt for some 'statement-modality' to revelation, and so 'something communicated about' God or Christ. But given the difficulties with the hermeneutical-problem (*supra* n. 1), one must give a respectful hearing to the 'always-pilgrim' or *semper-reformanda* conclusions of many neo-orthodox concerning propositional or doctrinal truth. Dowey, Piper, and, most probably, Barth, Brunner, and Calvin are spokesmen for this opinion. Actually this problem of doctrinal-truth is closely involved with the problem of 'knowing that we know the truth and knowing when we know the truth'--and so the problem of infallibility. We endeavored to show that the search of Outler and McAfee Brown for some sort of permanent truth-value was not inconsistent with the ultimate sovereignty of the Spirit, nor with the primacy of the 'encounter-aspect' of faith. This was so because the 'doctrinal-truth-value' and its certainty-amid-obscurity come just as much under the sole guarantee of the Spirit as the 'personal-encounter-moment' of faith. In fact, that there be a 'propositional (statement)-aspect' to faith, seems vital to the faith process itself, and certainly it is vital for any process of true doctrinal-development.

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[1] Luis Alonso-Schökel, "The Function of Language in the Scriptures," *Continuum*, 3 (1965-66), 22.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 24.

On Infallibility

On infallibility there will be three statements: one on its peculiar problematic for Catholic and for Protestant; one on the 'new apologetic' for the Catholic 'doctrine of infallibility; and then a final conclusion.

1. The Problematic of Infallibility

For the Catholic the 'doctrine of infallibility' adds a 'second-phase' to his faith. Consequently Dulles claims Catholic faith is specifically different from Protestant faith.[3]

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[3] Dulles, op. cit., p. 119.

In his act of faith the Catholic responds primarily to God speaking the gospel message, and in this he agrees with the Protestant. But in the same act of faith he responds secondarily to the primary belief as witnessed by the officially taught interpretation of the church whose teaching power is part of God's message and so of his belief. In this secondary aspect the Catholic differs from the Protestant. (We note that this ecclesial modality of faith-assent seems to be verified long before Vatican I's statement about it. In many ways it is comparable even to the faith-process of the early church.) The current Catholic problematic lay in clearly presenting as the unique motive of faith 'God speaking through the light of the Spirit.' He should never believe merely because the Pope or a Church Council says so. If this is the only motive for his faith, then his faith is merely human-faith. Rather he should believe what the Pope says because he believes God has (at least implicitly) revealed that He will speak the gospel-message on certain occasions through the Pope to whom He will at that moment give a special share in the divine infallibility by means of an 'inspiratio' of the Spirit. The revelation of this special-charism is denied by the Protestant--not, we presume, because such a charism would be impossible, but because as they have thus-far interpreted 'the revelation' it simply hasn't mentioned (or implied) this infallibility. This leaves

Catholic theologians the ecumenical task of presenting as clearly as they are able just how they think infallibility has been revealed. They must decide whether it has been revealed as a 'primary mystery' of faith fairly clearly articulated in the Scriptures; or as a necessary inference from some other primary mystery or mysteries, e.g., from the promise of the Spirit, or the promise of indefectibility, or by analogy with the Spirit's 'inspiratio' in the early Church--or by all three. However they do it this is "the" problem for contemporary Catholic theologians.

The Protestant problematic lies ultimately in their statement of denial that such a 'promise' has been revealed or that it can be legitimately inferred, or at least that it has been convincingly inferred. Concerning our own specific Presbyterian area vestiges of the problem have long appeared in the American Presbyterian subscription controversies. Even when they asked their subscription questions "properly" the basic problem still appeared. The 'proper' question could not be'whether you believe the Confession,' nor'whether you believe in Christ the Word speaking infallibly to me in and through this communal confession.' It took the 1967 changes in the Form of Government to clarify the confusion arising from the tendency to 'over-divinize' or 'over-define' the 'witnesses' as the Word of God and as deserving in themselves 'belief.'

Thus whereas the subscription formula formerly asked: 'Do you believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God?' and 'Do you receive and adopt the Confession as containing the system of Doctrine taught in the Holy Scripture?', presently the formula carefully distinguishes between the Revealer-we-believe-in (God speaking and asking response) and the human-witnesses in and through which He reveals (primarily the Scriptures and secondarily other human means). The subscription-formula now reads: 'Do you believe in one God and the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? Concerning the Scriptures (as witness) it asks: 'Do you accept the Scriptures to be the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ?' To the implicit question that immediately arises, namely: do the Scriptures really have the power (authority) of bearing 'true witness?', the Form of Government answers that in themselves they are powerless, but their witness becomes 'by the Holy Spirit God's word to you.' And this is where our question comes in. Can not this last mentioned interpretational process in which 'the Scriptures-become-Word' be communicated or recorded as a possible future witness to the same Word? Is 'the-becoming-Word' process so totally ineffable, or so immediately subject to error that it cannot be further communicated or recorded? And presuming a hesitant answer to these latter two alternatives the Catholic offers his third alternative: or do I (at least occasionally) need another interpreting-human-witness to discern with me the 'if,' 'when,' and 'precisely wherein' Scripture has 'become-the Word?' And so we are again at the Catholic answer of 'communal infallibility' as a special gift of 'communal faith.' Lest it be a total impasse, it should be noted that both Catholic and Protestant have much practical agreement even here. Rarely does the Catholic church lay claim to the special conciliar or papal infallibility. Most of her teachings are ordinary (e.g., Vatican II). The Protestant agrees with the Catholic on the potential witness-power of such teaching. Perhaps the Spirit's moment for 'communal faith' awaits a 'larger community.' Meantime we rely on our individual moments of faith and their relationship with the 'ordinary teaching' and the 'growing consensus.'

2. The New Catholic Apologetic

The 'new Catholic apologetic' for infallibility lay in two new emphases: the limited scope of papal and collegial infallibility, and the absolute necessity within the use of this infallibility for respecting the freedom of the Spirit relative to the 'moment' of the believer's 'inspiratio', as well as the believer's freedom of response.

Concerning the limited scope of papal-infallibility many questions need answering. Two, specifically, were pointed out: What is the Pope's obligation to consult the rest of the church? And, can papal 'peccability' ever directly oppose papal 'infallibility' such that a heretical proclamation is "defined?" In answer to the first question we have seen the decided tendency toward ecclesial-collegiality. To the second we were unable to discover any clear answer.[4] The meaning of 'infallibility' was deliberately not defined at Vatican I, and so whether or not it was conceived as excluding 'peccability' cannot be said. Our conjecture was that if the Pope could so sin, the Spirit could not inspire the people to believe the false-teaching, and the Spirit's "time" would bring about a clarification, even if need be by way of deposition. We added that such a simulated use of infallibility would really not be infallibility which requires the intention to define (not to simulate). There is no doubt that the pope can sin by omission and imprudence. But other limitations are clearer and more significant. The use of papal definition is for extraordinary cases (no specifications having been given as to how extraordinary) and only to declare or define already existent faith. In the preceding ecumenical-reflections we described the process as one of the Pope making public his own 'act of faith in the faith of the Church' under the special influence of the Spirit's 'light of faith,' and then offering it to the people as another human witness capable of being used by the Spirit to evoke their own faithful response. We added that his definition should never be imposed.

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[4] See M. Novak, "Authority in Ecumenical Perspective, Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 3 (1966) 365-68.

This brings us to the 'freedom issue,' and the single word says all that can be said. The Pope's act of faith in the Church's faith' (his infallibility) is personal to him in the sense that it cannot be simply transferred to the people. In itself the 'infallible-definition' (just as the Scriptures in themselves) is a human witness through and in which the Spirit will give his 'faith-revelation' gift, but to whom and when He chooses--and no one can demand his own 'moment.' The question can be asked: should people be punished if the Spirit does not inspire them to believe in a given decree at a given moment? This may be a hard question in the light of historical-precedent, but reason seems to make the answer obvious. Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom has given the long-overdue confession-of-principle (and implicitly of repentance) from the Catholic side.

3. Our Conclusion about Infallibility

The Protestant is searching for, and tending toward an ecclesial structured authority (at least toward authority by 'magno consensu' in the Church). Our new Christian-theology, especially in its 'catholic' tendency, makes a 'pan-Christian consensus' a viable criterion for communal-faith by virtue of mutual recognition of our common baptismal and historical unity in Christ--even amid our diversity. The Catholic, meantime, is being painfully stripped of historical accretions which are not nearly of the essence of ecclesial-authority. He is being asked to spell-out the 'collegiality' required for all members of the church in her revelational-life. Above all he is being asked to respect 'individual freedom' under the Spirit.

Each side, therefore, is closing its own 'credibility-gap.' Their apologetics continue to emphasize their own primary aspect, but Catholic and Protestant are beginning to recognize that in theologizing about the revelational process they are beginning to criss-cross. The Catholic emphasizes the ecclesial-episcopal-papal aspect of the revelation-process, but only as part of the community in which the individual finds his own faith. The Protestant emphasizes the ultimate radicality of the Spirit's free gift to the individual, but sees that this is going on in the midst of needed secondary ecclesial witnessing ('infallible' at least in the 'moment of faith'). Under the Spirit convergence and exchange of insights have begun.

On Living Revelation

Concerning the living-revelation and the new breadth to the theology of revelation there is Christian consensus. Revelation is much more than propositional-truths and the infallibility problem. The witnesses to God's revelation are myriad, and He uses them all. God speaks His Word in ways and at moments of His own choosing. The gap between Christianity and the world has been closed. Christ redeemed the world. His gospel is preached in this world and the world is a part of it. In this sense the world is Christian. But in spite of the uniqueness of his historical-temporal culture each Christian believer follows basically the same path-of-revelation traversed by Christ in his own human consciousness, and recorded by the church in her doctrinal history. The core-gospel remains the same: always old and always new. Christ, the first recipient and first human-revealer of revelation, maintains both the revealing and the recipient functions in us. He lives in his Church. In and through his Church we are destined to share with him the fullness of his revelation when he 'shows us to the Father.'

AREAS FOR RESEARCH

The Protestant Side

Among the aspects of revelation-theology the following are recommended for further study. On the Protestant side there should be (1) further reflection on the incarnational- or christocentric- principle. It would seem to have a far greater extension into the human-temporal-historical world than previous development has allowed. Contemporary theologies of the Spirit and of his _intrinsic_ sanctification of mankind demand that the Third Divine Person, too, _in_-_flu_-ence and _com_-_plete_ God's work for man. This applies especially to 'faith,' for He is the Spirit of Truth and of Love. (2) As a corrollary to this Reform theologians should _reform_-ulate their "theology of the Fall" such that it takes cognizance of the intrinsic effects of sanctification and reanalyzes the vestiges of the "natura completa corrupta" doctrine (especially in its epistemological aspects--the effects of the Fall on human-reason). (3) Thirdly in their _epistemology of faith_ they should carefully distinguish: _peccability_ (the potential for sin and deceit in the knower), _fallibility_ (the potential for error), _correctibility_ (the potential for _negative_ reform--i.e., from error), _exterior-reformability_ (language adaptation and transculturalization), _interior-reformability_ (the _positive reform_ or development of _meaning_ of doctrine due to deeper insight) on the one side AND _impeccability_ (immunity from sin), _infallibility_ (the power of discernment in believer and/or teacher, guaranteeing the reception of and/or the communication of the faith-truth without error), _irreformability_ (the permanent and authoritative truth-value of a doctrine's _meaning_--in our case, 'the divinely intended meaning'), and _indefectibility_ freedom from defection in the very continuity of existence--

not merely in truth or non-truth). All of these are to be viewed especially in terms of a theology of 'the continuing revelational process in its developmental nature.' And finally (4) let the systematic theologians reflect further on the doctrinal implications underlying church polity, especially relating to structures within the 'community of the Spirit' for expressing a 'group consensus on faith' or a 'communal act of faith,'--with of course the ultimate possibility of a 'defining charism' shared in by the whole Church as it rests under the Spirit (differently by different members). The _interrelationships_ of these four suggestions are also worthy of reflection.

The Catholic Side

On their part, Roman Catholics must (1) reflect upon their own _epistemology of faith and authority_ to see whether it is _in every case_ founded on only one ultimate source--the Word of God in Christ revealing Himself through the Spirit. _Even in the face of Scripture_ and a _charismatically-infallible Church_ the revelational gift and its authority ultimately depend on the Spirit's illumination and gift to _each soul_. Hence no one can believe solely because the Church teaches so. (2) Let them reflect on their theology of sin and sinfulness as it influences their authority structures even their teaching and governing processes. This demands a clarification of the interrelationship between infallibility and peccability. When, for example, if ever, is church teaching guaranteed against the sin of "falsehood" whether by omission or commission? Finally, (3) they should clarify ecclesial-collegiality for all members of the church, especially in relationship to the 'defining or declaring of faith' process. 'When' may the Council, or the Pope ex-cathedra, declare or define a 'dogma' as revealed? Granting that the declaration process has its own charism and 'moment of decision,' when and how do the declarants themselves attain the 'revelation-faith' which they decide to declare? Concretely, what presuppositions underlie the 'ex-cathedra' moment of papal declaration? One certain presupposition is that the declaration be already 'a matter of faith-revelation.' When and how does this revelation transmit or 'tradition' itself to the Pope-as-believer relative to the moment of Pope-as-definer? If there is such a thing as 'papal peccability' even with regard to sins-against-faith, and there is, can the Pope sin in regard to his office of 'ex-cathedra' definition, and by whom, or by what body, and by what process must such a discernment be made? Lastly and most importantly: must not each individual discern and make a 'decision of response' with regard to each dogma in accord with the 'intrinsic credibility' of the proposed dogma and his own capability of comprehending it?

How many Catholics, for example, have sufficient comprehension of the 'dogma on papal infallibility' even to comprehend its factual statement (what they are asked to believe)?

A CLOSING WORD

We close, happy that one prophecy is being fulfilled, and offering another. Seventy years ago after being "excommunicated" from the church he loved Briggs wrote:

> . . . It is now clear to the historical critic that there is one-sidedness in Protestantism as well as in Roman Catholicism; that neither of these great religious bodies is to conquer the other; and that a reconciliation can take place only by each overcoming its own defects and becoming more comprehensively Christian . . .
>
> We may reasonably expect that the theological conflicts, the dissolutions of old theology, the reconstructions of new theology, the intense and eager researches after the truth of God, will result in a crisis in which all the forces of Christianity will come into play in order to give birth to a new age of the world in which the discord of Christendom will die away and concord will live and reign and express its new faith and new life in a Creed . . . in which all the essential doctrines of Christianity, learned from all the struggles and triumphs of twenty centuries, will be grouped about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.[5]

Unknowingly Briggs has accurately eulogized the Book of Confessions. In adopting it his Church has overcome defects and become more comprehensively Christian. Edward Dowey, the Chairman of the Committee of Fifteen who drafted the

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[5] Briggs, On Church Unity, pp. 313-14.

Confession of 1967, summarizes 'much' in the brief dedication he pre-fixed to his commentary: "To the Elders, Pastors, and Teachers of the Special Committee . . . who persevered to the end!"[6] After the long struggle was over and the new Confession of 1967 was born, Dowey was asked to make a statement. Like Briggs he chose the prophetic mode:

> Now we can look forward . . . Fundamentalism is as dead as the merely social gospel. Our heritage is older, richer, and more alive than most of us dreamed. Our own past has demanded that we live in the present . . .
>
> . . . Now we must study it, teach it, preach from it, and live it in . . . a responsible way. We must also be ready to move beyond it when the time comes. Our faith and hope are not focused on a confession or a church constitution but upon 'him who . . . is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think.' These are the concluding words of the Book of Confessions.[7]

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[6] Dowey, A Commentary . . . , p. 5.

[7] Edward A. Dowey, Presbyterian Life, (April 1, 1967), p. 24.

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